

We Offer No Apologies!

5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"^[a] made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblia, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

There is an old Swedish folktale about a boy with the red hat. He came from a very poor family but his mother one day took her best yarn and knitted him a beautiful red hat. Wherever the boy went people were so impressed with his red hat they offered him many things for it, but he refused to trade. The princess even offered him a kiss for the hat but he stubbornly refused. Finally, the king offered his solid gold crown in exchange for the hat. Frightened the boy ran back to home. He told his mother about all his adventures. His older brother overheard and ridiculed the boy, saying, "You fool. We could have sold the king's crown and bought a castle and still have enough money to live in luxury all our lives." Confused the boy asked his mother, "Was I a fool?" She said, "No. Not all the silver or gold in the world would make you look better than you do in your little red hat."

We believe there is one Triune God revealed to us in his inspired, inerrant word. We believe that this God came to this world as a sinless human to die for our sins and give us eternal life. But do you ever feel foolish for believing this? How do you react when your hair stylist asks pointed questions about your faith and religion? Likewise, the world has many nice things to offer us in exchange for our faith. Why give up Sunday mornings or Monday evenings for church, or to read the Bible when there is so much on TV? And the simplicity of the Bible looks so foolish before the supposed wisdom of the world.

The devil and our sinful flesh tempt us to feel foolish about our faith and Lord. But let's listen to the Apostle Paul. Like him let's not offer any apologies for the message and for believing it.

I. For the Message

If you bumped into someone, you would be expected to say, "Excuse me." Well, you would think that the Apostle Paul owed a lot of people an apology. It seemed that wherever he went people got mad at him. They called him names, drove him out of town, arrested him, whipped him, even stoned him close to death. But does Paul apologize? No. ***5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.***

The message that Paul preached and which we should all preach is God's Word, nothing more and nothing less. And simply share it. As Paul confessed just verses before, ***"We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."*** Be careful for scams. They are tricky. A couple times now the phone rang and a computerized voice said this is Amazon and someone is trying to charge \$999 to your account. Dial one to speak to a representative. I hung up. I checked online with the FTC and it was a scam. My son got a letter from a South Dakota hospital requesting him to mail in his social security number. The letter looked suspicious. We didn't. One simple rule: never give you social security number or any other information over the phone. If you are in doubt, the FTC has a site dedicated solely to scams.

This is not how the Lord operates. There are no secret shameful ways. He does not use deception. He simply sets forth the truth plainly before us. He speaks to us plainly in his Bible and tells us to speak plainly.

He also wants us to focus on his Word and not the preacher. ***"7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."*** In the past God had chosen some spectacular ways to speak to his people: a burning bush, a symphony of trumpets and thunder, through angels, even through a donkey once. But I ask you. If God still chose to speak to us through a donkey and we brought one in here each week to do the sermon, what will we be known as? The church with the talking donkey. God's goal and our goal is that we are known as the church that preaches Christ crucified and not the one with a donkey for a pastor. So let's hide behind the Bible.

Why? ***"... to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."*** The people resisted Paul, as they resist today, because of Christ. Many like the Jews in Paul's day find the message of Christ a stumbling block. They were going their merry way thinking they were going to heaven because of their heritage or laws and suddenly they trip over Christ who says that he alone is the way, the truth, the life. People trip over Christ today as they go their merry way thinking they have nothing to fear about judgement day or they are pretty good folks and don't need a Savior. Then they trip on Christ who says that he alone takes away sin and gives eternal life.

Many are like the Gentiles of Paul's day who are unable to accept the supernatural, laughing at the resurrection or rejecting the notion that man is evil and sinful. They argue vehemently with God and say man is basically good, there is no day or reckoning before God, and we don't need his rules or Word.

But this is the simple plain message of God. We are sinners from the moment of conception. That infant is a sinner and in need of forgiveness. There is a God and we have to one day give a reckoning for our lives. We cannot eradicate our sin like washing dirt off in the shower. But God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem us, to buy us back, from sin and its damnation. We are forgiven on account of Christ and know without a doubt that because of him we will spend an eternity in the glory of God's heaven.

In other words, we are saved not by anything we have done, but by the power and grace of God. This reminds me of Gideon who was commanded by God to attack and destroy the Midianites. Gideon raised an army of 32,000 soldiers. The Lord pared that number down to 10,000 and eventually 300. Then God forbade Gideon to arm his soldiers with anything except torches and trumpets. As you know, because of God, Gideon's small army routed the Midianites. It was all the Lord's work. And your salvation, your relationship with God, your eternity in heaven is solely the work of God, not on the ability of the preacher or in the genius of discovery. As Paul stated, "***6 For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.***" God said let there be light and the darkness was pierced by light. God's Word is a light that pierces the ignorance and folly of this world and shows us the way in Christ.

II. For believing it.

My friends, do not apologize for the message. Though many will ridicule us for it, it is God's message of salvation through Jesus Christ. And don't apologize for believing it.

Telemarketers are not employees of the companies whose products they are selling. Telemarketers are hired to read a script over the phone and try to make sales. Paul was not a telemarketer. He actually believed and put into practice what he preached.

Yet the world tried to make Paul think twice about believing in and preaching Christ, and they do the same to us. The Apostle Paul experienced much hardship because of the Word. He generalizes his afflictions by saying, "***We are hard pressed on every side, . . . perplexed, . . . persecuted; . . . struck down.***" This doesn't sound like a well-organized army of God marching to victory. It sounds like a group of misfits who are struggling every step of the way. The words Paul uses here are very strong and vivid. But did you catch it? Despite all the trouble in his life, he is surviving because of God's grace. Pressed on every side is used to describe the crushing of grapes or pinched in a vice. Yet, though locked in a vice, he wasn't completely crushed. He was confused, but not completely in doubt; he was being pursued like a coyote chased down by hunting dogs, but not completely left behind by God's grace. He was smacked down to the ground, but not ground into dust.

If this was merely a job to Paul, he would have quite long ago. But he didn't because it wasn't merely a job. It is a matter of life, eternal life, and survival, not in this world but to survive for the world to come, heaven. If our goal is to survive in this world alone, that is all we get, this world and what it deserves for resisting God. But our goal isn't to survive now. Our goal is to cling to God and survive into heaven.

Paul even takes it one step further. "***10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.***" To live and preach Christ is like carrying death around our necks. The world threatens us with the death of our bodies. But that is not the death we carry. We carry the death of Jesus. The world will reject us, but with Christ we have died to the world. The world embraces sin, but with Christ we have died to it and are accepted by God as Christ's blood brothers and sisters, his blood, our adoption.

And one more thing. This entire situation lets the gospel shine more brightly. The fact that we don't shine as clearly or brightly as God, but instead have our human frailties and weaknesses, shows that this all surpassing power comes from God and not us. And the fact we are willing to suffer all for it, and willing to endure all to share it, says this gospel is a treasure.

God has given us a great treasure: the gospel of Jesus Christ. Wear it like the boy with the red hat. Don't trade it in for anything in anything in the world. And don't think it is foolish to believe. Like Paul, our infirmities, our setbacks, our suffering, become opportunities to let the power of God shine. So, don't apologize for it. Wear your hat. INJ Amen.