

## Romans: A Solid Foundation for Christian Living

### Message 5: Making an Impression for Christ's Sake

#### Text: Romans 1:8-10

I spoke on the phone with Byron Banta the other day. He's one of my mentors in the ministry, one who taught me most what it means to be a pastor. In fact, he taught me much about being a Christian. Though it's been twenty years since he served as my field supervisor during a ministry internship while in college, we're still close. I'm ashamed to admit it – we only speak once or maybe twice a year. But the closeness remains because of the impact he had on my life – the impression he made for the sake of Christ.

I pray for many more men and women like Byron Banta. I pray that I might be even more like Him in my spiritual walk. Look out at the world. Don't you see it? A glaring need for faithful Christian witnesses? For godly examples from which others can learn how to live for Christ? Jesus knew how important they were. That's why he didn't just teach his disciples. He spent three years living with them, modeling what He was all about, so that, when their turn came, they too could live the life of Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, one of his earlier messages to them, he said in Matt. 5:16, "*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*" Jesus knew that the Christian life was caught as well as taught.

Well, in our text this morning we are going to see how we can see that the Christian message is as much caught from us as it is taught. In Romans 1:8-10 we see it. Paul has concluded his introduction and address to the deepest of letters, and now he is getting down to business. And the first thing he does is thank God for the Roman believers. Why? Because even without the ministry of Paul or others, though they were not yet fully mature, and though they had some challenges to face, they still lived to make an impression for the sake of their Lord. Listen to what the Bible says (read).

Paul says, "*I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.*" In other words, people were talking about the Romans and their faith. It was drawing attention. Not in a bad way, like "hey, look at us." But in a good way. It could have been that people who had come to Christ through Paul's ministry had traveled to Rome on business and ran into some of them. Seeing the work of Christ in their lives, they brought news back that, "The Lord is at work in Rome." That would have been news, for Rome was widely known as a pagan city. And yet, here's this group of people – some Jew, others Gentile – and yet their faith in Christ is making an impact.

But how? And more important, how might we? What is it that we should be doing so that we would make an impression for Christ? I suggest that this is a question worthy of our attention. Our vision as a church is to be a center of

revival and awakening in and beyond the Panhandle. And if we are ever going to see this vision become reality, than it has to be about more than what we teach. People must see the impact of our faith. They must see how it changes our lives. So, what do we do? Well, there are two principles to this end apparent in our text.

#### 1. Cultivate your inward faith.

Vs. 8: "*Your faith is being reported.*" Notice that Paul thanks God not for the Romans' great accomplishments, whatever they may have been. He thanks them for their faith. It is the testimony of their faith that is being spoken of.

Now the word faith in the New Testament can speak to several things. The word literally means one's belief or assurance. It is the trust one places in something. And sometimes it is used to describe the trust we place in Christ for salvation (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 5:1 – "*We have been justified through faith.*") Often it speaks of the trust in God by which we live (Rom. 1:17, "*The righteous will live by faith*") – the belief that He is who He is and will do what He says He will do. And then it is used to describe the doctrine that holds us together (Jude 3 – "*I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*"). And sometimes it wraps all of these uses together into one big package describing the sum total of the Christian life (1 Pet. 1:7, trials come to prove a faith that is "*of greater worth than gold*"). And it is this latter that I believe Paul is describing.

The Romans were known to have a vibrant, living, trust in the Lord. It was the faith that saved them. It was the faith they lived by. It was the faith they would grow to understand and pass along to others. It was all of it. And it drew comment from believers and non-believers alike. Another way of describing it, given that faith is a commitment of the heart, is that they had yielded themselves to the Lord so that He would transform their lives from the inside – out.

And how crucial is this for us, if we too are to make an impression for the sake of Christ. Faith is at first inward. I've known some who have the words of faith, but not the heart. Others can pull off some of the deeds of faith for a while, but it doesn't last. Strong, growing, sincere faith that makes an impact for Christ begins on the inside. But how do we develop it?

We'll learn more about this as we get into Romans, but for now let me share a couple of thoughts.

- First and foremost, faith is a gift of God; therefore, it is not merely something we conjure up. Romans 12:3 speaks of the measure of faith that God gives. And Galatians 5:22 describes faith as part of the fruit of the Spirit. Now I don't understand all that this means, but I know enough to know that it's not about me; it's about Him.

- Second, though faith is God's gift and the fruit of His Spirit's activity in our lives, we have a responsibility in relation to it. That's why we are called to live by faith. We are to exercise it, to use it, to nurture it and develop it. The balance is kind of like that of a farmer, who does not make the crop grow – God does; and yet, the crop will not grow unless the farmer does his part. In the same way, we have a part to play in developing the inward faith that supports everything else in the Christian life.

This is why spiritual disciplines are so important. Richard Foster describe spiritual disciplines as the means by which we place ourselves before God, so that He can do in our lives only that which He can do. Some of those disciplines include: prayer; studying God's word, meditating on God's word, worship, and service. There are more, but these are among the more crucial, and this is why we base our ministry on them. They are here so that we might develop that inward faith, that God would change us from the inside out, that we might make an impression for Him.

## 2. Elevate your outward faith.

Vs. 8: "Your faith is being reported..." The testimony of their faith was communicated to others, which means that it was seen and observed.

Now this tells us something important. Faith is essentially internal and invisible. So how could it be seen? Go back to v. 5: Paul's mission in life was to "*call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.*" In other words, faith leads to obedience. And while faith cannot be seen, obedience can be.

See, the Romans had a faith that just could not be contained. It couldn't be kept to their private lives, or even their meeting place. It had to come out. Like water overflowing a pail and flowing all over the place, their growing, maturing inward faith began to flow out of their lives and effect everything they touched.

How do we know this? Their testimony during the Neronian persecution tells us, as does their testimony in the late first and early second centuries (Justin ascribes his conversion to the testimony of the early Christians).

Now, elevating your outward faith is not about becoming a braggart. But it is about letting your light shine for Him. The world will tell you that faith is a private matter. Just keep it to yourself. But authentic faith cannot be contained. It will change your life. It will come out.

So how do we elevate it? Again, the text doesn't tell us how it worked with the Romans, but let me make a suggestion: simply live it. If you live according to your faith, your life will be different and others will know.

## Conclusion

As I said in the beginning, Jesus said that we are to let our light shine before men, that they would see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven. This is what the Romans did, and why through their faith they made an impression for Christ. It's why others were talking. They cultivated their inward faith and elevated their outward faith.

We can do the same. And when we do, we will be on the way to truly making an impression for Christ's sake.

So what about you? What impression are you making for your Lord...