

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

Remember The Shame That Brings Glory

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23)

Analysis by Steven C. Kuhl

[8] Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, [9] for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. [10] Therefore I endured everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. [11] The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

[12] if we endure with him, we will reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

[13] if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself. [14] Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. [15] Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Diagnosis: Ashamed

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *The Shame of an*

Apostle Imprisoned

Paul left young Timothy to tend the flock in Asia Minor. Indeed, Paul had assured the congregation that Timothy, whom he mentored, came with his highest recommendation to preach the same gospel that he, Paul, had preached. What more could the young pastor want? The Apostle Paul as his top reference! Problem was, Paul, who did the recommending, was also the Paul whose person and gospel (v. 9) was regarded as shameful by many in the congregation. He—and his gospel—couldn't stay out of trouble. Indeed, Paul was imprisoned for the sake of his gospel, and Timothy was sorely tempted to join the rest of the congregation in deserting Paul and allow him to bear his shame alone. After all, wouldn't Paul's gospel run the church into the same ruin and shame that it had done to him?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Ashamed of the Gospel of Christ*

As Paul freely admits, there is an undeniable inseparability between him and the gospel he preaches. The gospel he preaches is the source of his hardship; it is the reason for his imprisonment; it is the cause of his shame. Even more, that gospel could very likely lead to hardship for Timothy and the congregation (vv. 11-12). But, as Paul also reminds Timothy—and anyone else who would listen—the very gospel that causes him so much trouble is his only secondarily, as a job assignment given. He is only doing his job! Primarily, the gospel he preaches is the creation of Christ Jesus himself, who was also treated as a criminal and regarded with shame—and who alone is responsible for that which seems so shameful in Paul's life. In other words, to be ashamed of Paul and his gospel is to be ashamed of Christ Jesus himself. No “wrangling over words” (v. 14) or cunning sophistry can undo that simple truth. To desert Paul is to desert Christ Jesus and the gospel he established in suffering and shame (v. 15).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Eternal Shame*

What Paul would have Timothy remember—and those who are ashamed of his imprisonment for the sake of the gospel of Christ Jesus—is that there is a shame that is much worse than that Paul was experiencing for the sake of the gospel. There is an eternal shame—one that is impossible to avoid—that is directly linked to their embarrassment at Paul's shameful imprisonment and Christ's shameful crucifixion. No matter how much Paul may have wished to spare them embarrassment, he could not for the sake of the elect. For "to deny Christ," and the shame that following him entails, is to "be denied by Christ" (v. 12b) and miss out on the eternal glory/approval he won. Therefore, as Paul warns, their refusal to be shameful (the way Paul and Christ are shameful) assured them of an eternal shame. That saying is sure, too (v. 11a)!

Prognosis: Approved

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Eternal Glory/Eternal Approval*

The one thing that Paul wants Timothy and the rest of the congregation to remember is the whole story of Christ Jesus: shame and glory, cross and resurrection (v. 8). The two belong together, and nothing can separate them. Though "we are faithless" Jesus Christ "remains faithful" (v. 13). Nothing can change the fact that Christ Jesus purposely suffers shame, divine disapproval, and death in order to bring about eternal glory, divine approval, and new life "for the elect" (v. 10). Our denial of his shame, while it does separate us from the glory of Christ, does not negate the glory of Christ (vv. 12b-13). Christ's experience of shame and glory remains the gospel truth, and it remains the truth "for the elect." What's more, that gospel truth is exhibited not only in Christ's history, but in Paul's own biographical witness to the gospel. Though his detractors "are faithless," Paul "remains faithful."

Like the Christ who willingly endured suffering and shame to bring forth the glory of new life, Paul asserts “I endure everything [suffering, hardship, shame] for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory” (v. 10).

Step 5: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Solution) – *Remembering–Approvingly–the Shame that Brings Glory is to be the Elect*

Paul’s mission, which is the mission of preachers every Sunday, is to help his dear congregation, and its dear pastor, Timothy, to remember approvingly the shame of the cross that brings forth the glory of the resurrection. That is to say, he regarded them as the elect. For to remember and approve of Christ in his suffering and shame—as well as the suffering and shame of his workers, like Paul—is to be the elect, is to have the glory, the divine approval, that Christ’s shameful crucifixion established. While we who believe (the elect) do not yet have that glory in hand, we certainly have it by faith as we live in remembrance of him. To approve of the whole Christ (in both his shame and glory) is to be the elect, approved by Christ, shameful though we be (v. 15).

Step 6: Final Diagnosis (External Solution) – *Living the Shame that Brings Glory*

Being the elect eventuates in a life that endures suffering and shame as Paul’s did, as Christ’s did—a life lived for the elect, for the salvation of God’s people. No matter what trouble the gospel may bring to our life, by remembering Christ’s shame and glory we live now as workers of Christ and thus, “have no need to be ashamed” (v. 15). “If we endure, we will also reign with him” (v. 12b). Indeed, we who believe the shame-to-glory gospel story cannot be shamed by the taunts of this world into changing our way of life (i.e., our desire for the elect) no matter what kind of hardships we encounter. That’s because, like Christ and

like his servant Paul, "we endure everything," not to secure our own reputation among our fellow human beings. We have no need of that. Rather, we live as Christ lived, as Paul lived, "for the sake of the elect," so that "they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure . . ."