

A CHURCH WITH A REPUTATION

(Romans 1:8-13)

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Franklin once said, “Glass, china, and reputation are easily cracked and never well mended.”

William Shakespeare’s Othello lamented the loss of his reputation after he had acted foolishly, “Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself; and what remains is bestial!” (Othello, Act II, Scene 3).

Reputation is a strange thing, isn’t it? How are we to think of reputation? Is it fragile like glass and china? Is it immortal? Is it worth having? Or is it better for us not even to be concerned about such matters?

The answer, it seems to me, is that it depends on what we have a reputation for. In his letter to the Romans, Paul commends the Christians in Rome for the reputation they had acquired. In fact, the reputation of their faith is the very first thing Paul notes as he begins the body of his letter. We read about this in Romans 1:8:

(Rom 1:8 NKJV) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

The church at Rome was a church with a reputation. Every church is a church with a reputation – some good, some not so good. *I recall that the first church I pastored full time was a church with a tarnished reputation. Shortly after I moved there I was in a local furniture store looking for a piece of furniture and introduced myself as the new pastor of this church. The owner said, “Well, I feel sorry for you because that church is one with a reputation of being hard to pastor!” And this came from a local merchant. Well, the church wasn’t really hard on me. In fact it was a good experience, but no less, the church had a reputation and it did have its problems.*

Every church has a reputation. Mt. Liberty has a reputation. The reputation that we need to strive for is to have one like the church at Rome, a church with a reputation for their faith.

How do you build a church with a reputation of faith?

HAVE AN ESTABLISHED FAITH

First, to build a church with a reputation for having faith you must be established in the faith. This is what Paul wanted to help the Roman church to do. Listen again to verses 11 and 12:

(Rom 1:11-12 NKJV) For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established; {12} that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Paul wanted to help them be established in the faith. This was one of Paul's concerns in other churches also. To the Thessalonian church he wrote:

(1 Th 3:2 NKJV) and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,

The Greek word for established is *stee rik thee nai* which is from the word which means "a foundation, a solid body (stereoma)." The idea is to have a solid foundation for our life and faith. Like an edifice, a building, it is only as strong as the foundation. The foundation must be secure.

We all need a firm foundation of faith. A building is only as strong as its foundation as the saying goes. Just think of the building such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It's problem is a soft foundation.

Scientists say that the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy is going to fall. Scientists go there yearly to measure the building's slow descent. They report that the 179-foot tower moves about one-twentieth of an inch a year, and is now 17 feet out of plumb. Before they began renovating it they estimated that by the year 2007 the 928 year-old tower will have leaned too far and will collapse onto the nearby restaurant. Now they are moving it back about 1 inch a year. Quite significantly, the word "Pisa" means "marshy land," which gives some clue as to why the tower began to lean even before it was completed.

The Apostle Paul was a person who wanted to help people develop a firm foundation for their faith, to establish them in the faith.

HOW DO YOU BECOME ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH?

Next, we need to ask, "How do you become established in the faith?" We get some very good clues from Paul's writings.

In Romans 16 we see that the foundation of our faith is the Gospel. Turn to chapter 16:

(Rom 16:25-26 NKJV) Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began {26} but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith;

Paul says that it is God who will establish them according to the Gospel and preaching of Jesus Christ. Paul knew that their faith must be grounded in the Gospel. It is the Gospel that frees us. It is the Gospel that saves us. It is the Gospel that grounds us in the faith.

What is the Gospel? As I preached last Sunday, the theme of the entire book of Romans is the Gospel. Paul wrote the book to explain the gospel in depth that the Christians at Rome would be established in the faith.

I noticed something when I was reading the end of Romans in chapter 16, verses 25 and 26. They sound very similar to the opening passage of 1:1-5:

(Rom 1:1-5 NKJV) Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God {2} which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, {3} concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, {4} and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. {5} Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,

It is like these two passages are the book ends of the book. The closing passage goes over some of the same themes as the opening passage. Similar themes are found in both ends: the gospel of God; promised before through His prophets; concerning His Son Jesus Christ; obedience to the faith among all nations. So this is another clue that Paul's purpose was to explain the gospel in depth through the book of Romans.

To be established in the faith we must be grounded in the full message and significance of the good news of Christ. We must understand that the death, resurrection, and ascension of the eternal Son of God is not only what saves us from the penalty of our sin, but it is what saves us from the power of sin in our lives as Christians, it the good news for the world, and it is the good news that

must be lived out in daily practice. This is what it means to be established in the faith.

If Mt. Liberty is to continue to have a growing and glowing reputation for our faith, we must be grounded in the full message of the Gospel. Amen? Amen!

SIGNS OF AN UNSTABLE FAITH

What are some signs of needing to be more established in the faith?

One sign of a weak faith is to be turned aside from Christ because of difficulties. Paul dealt with this in chapter 8:35-37

(Rom 8:35-37 NKJV) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? {36} As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." {37} Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

We all will experience difficulties in life, but if we are established in the faith, if we are established in the Gospel, we know that “all things work for the good who are called by God” and that “in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Another sign of a weak faith is in lagging in diligence and lost of fervor in serving the Lord. Paul mentions this in chapter 12

(Rom 12:11 NKJV) not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

We all lag at time in diligence and at times we lose some of our enthusiasm in serving the Lord, but if we are established in the faith, if we are established in the Gospel, we will present ourselves as living sacrifices to the will of God.

Another sign of weak faith is having difficult accepting some who have a different scruples about what is pleasing to God. Paul deals with this in chapter 15

(Rom 15:1 NKJV) We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

We all are different in some ways, but if we are established in the faith, if we are established in the Gospel, we will accept others as the Lord has accepted us and we will bear with one another.

A Church that has a reputation for faith is a church built upon the Gospel of Christ. It is a church grounded in Christ and his Word.

A CHURCH THAT HAS A REPUTATION FOR FAITH MUST SHOW IT TO OTHERS.

Finally, a church that has a reputation for faith must show it to others. Paul says that their **“faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”** (v. 8).

To have a faith spoken of through the whole world they must have shown it openly to others. When they responded to the gospel their lives changed and others knew it.

Like a caterpillar that had been transformed into a butterfly, the Romans' lives were noticeably changed now that they'd believed God's good news

Faith makes a noticeable difference because genuine faith can never stay hidden or private for long. *It's like the first time you fell in love. Remember what was going through your mind, as you wondered, "Maybe this is the right one. Maybe this strange feeling I'm having is the real thing." So finally you muster the courage to say, "I love you," and you feel completely awkward as for the first time you make your love public, putting into words what's been growing in your heart. And if the person doesn't laugh in your face, maybe you say it a few more times, until finally saying, "I love you" starts feeling natural, normal. If that love keeps growing, perhaps you eventually exchange wedding vows and wear wedding rings- again very public acts that make express your love in a public way.*

Can you imagine being in love but never letting your love out, just keeping it bottled up inside you for the rest of your life? That's just not natural, and it's also not natural to have faith in Jesus and to keep it private and hidden.

The church at Rome showed their love for Christ openly, by how they worshiped Him, by how they related to each other, by how they handled life, by how they told others about Him. This is the same today. We show others our love for Christ openly by how we worship Him, by how we relate to one another, by how we tell others about him.

CONCLUSION

Rome was a church known for their faith. Paul encouraged them to continue in that faith, to be established in that faith, to share that faith.

We want to be a church with a reputation, a reputation for our faith in Christ. I encourage you to continue in that faith, to be established in that faith, to share that faith.

Amen? Amen!