

The Mission of the Church
Romans 1:16
Part 2

From time to time in the course of our lives there are what I call teachable moments. I believe we are in the midst of one of those moments now.

If you have been reading newspapers, listening to radio or watching television I am sure that you are well aware of the debate that has been stirred up by Proposition 8. And what is Proposition 8?

Proposition 8 is a proposed state constitutional amendment that will appear on our November ballot designed to overturn the practice of granting marriage licenses to same sex couples in the State of California.

Since Proposition 8 reflects the biblical and traditional definition of marriage we might think that it would have a very good chance of passing but this is not the case at all. In fact, it would appear that there is a good chance that Proposition 8 will not pass.

At the present time fifty-one percent of Californians support same-sex unions or; in other words, at the present time fifty-one percent of Californians do in fact oppose Proposition 8. Is this troubling? Of course it is troubling! How could it not be troubling? Marriage is one of the most basic building blocks of society and it is now, it would appear, in the process of being redefined in the State of California in a way that is not consistent with the biblical or traditional definition of marriage.

So the question that we must ask ourselves as a church is this: Lord, in light of the possible defeat of Proposition 8, how would you have us to respond?

Understanding how the church should respond to the prospect of Proposition 8 not passing, based on what the Scriptures teach, requires that we know three different things.

My hope over the course of this study is that after we consider these three things we will not only understand how the church should respond but that we will respond.

So, what was the first thing that I shared with you that we need to know?
The church needs to know the real problem that we are facing.

Some might think that the real problem that we are facing as a church is the possible defeat of Proposition 8, but we need to understand that its possible defeat is not the real problem at all. The possible defeat of Proposition 8 is only a symptom. So if the possible defeat is only a symptom then what is the real problem?

The real problem facing the church today is that the world is spiritually dead and under the control of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-2). This is the real problem.

Let me read for you **Ephesians 2:1-2** and see if this is not so. **“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”** So, what is the real problem facing the church today?

It is this: The world, apart from Christ, is spiritually dead and under the control of Satan. Is this important for us to know? Of course it is! Understanding this one basic biblical fact helps us to see the long-term futility of seeking to change the thinking and conduct of the world through the ballot box or through any other secular means. Hopefully this point that I have tried to make for you, based on **Ephesians 2:1-2**, is obvious to you.

Unfortunately, this is not obvious to certain well-meaning church leaders who are presently seeking to mobilize their congregations to rally support for Proposition 8 within our community. Will their efforts prove successful? I do not believe, based on **Ephesians 2:1-2**, that those efforts over time will be at all productive. In fact, I believe that those efforts will over time prove to be counterproductive.

This leads us to the second thing we need to know if we are going to understand how we as a church should respond to the possibility of Proposition 8 not passing. So, what is this second thing we need to know?

It is this: Not only does the church need to know the real problem it is facing in respect to the world in which it is living, but the church needs to know God’s solution. Yes, the world is dead in trespasses and sins. Yes, the world

is under the control of Satan, but the situation is not hopeless. There is a solution. And what is it?

God's solution for the world's spiritual deadness and enslavement to Satan is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16).

Let me read for you **Romans 1:16**. “**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.**” So what is God's solution? The gospel of Christ is God's solution.

Every day we are surrounded with people who are spiritually dead and who are under the control of Satan. This is a terrible thing, not just for us, but also more importantly for them.

So how can these people be delivered from their spiritual deadness? How can they be set free from Satan's control? There is only one solution and that is God's solution. And what is God's solution? God's solution according to **Romans 1:16** is the gospel of Christ.

This is the truth. And this morning I would like to focus on this truth by looking more specifically at what Paul said in **Romans 1:16**.

Let me begin by setting the scene. Paul, just prior to **Romans 1:16**, had been explaining why he was planning to come to the Roman church. He was coming in order to carry out his apostolic mandate, which was to reach the Gentiles with the gospel of Christ.

This is what he had been doing before Rome. This is what he would be doing in Rome. And this is what he would be doing after he left Rome. He did all things for the sake of the gospel. But why was the gospel so important to him? This brings us now to **Romans 1:16** where Paul explains to us exactly why the gospel is so important to him.

So how does the verse begin? It begins with these words, “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel.**” When Paul said that he was not ashamed of the gospel this was kind of a round about way of saying that he was, in fact, proud of it. Certainly he was proud of it.

He was really excited about the gospel. Rather than hiding it he wanted to put it on display. He wanted to make it known in as many places as possible without any regard for himself or his own personal welfare. He loved the gospel, or putting it a little different way, he was not ashamed of it.

But why was he not ashamed of the gospel and why was he seeking to make it known wherever he went? Let us continue to read **Romans 1:16**. **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.”** Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel? He was not ashamed of it because it was the way God saved people. That is why.

As Paul went from city to city within the Roman Empire, what did he see? He saw people who were dead in trespasses and sins and who were under the control of Satan. This is what he saw. He saw spiritual zombies being led about by the ruler of darkness; or in other words, he saw Satan’s children who were headed toward eternal destruction. This is what he saw.

But he did not feel helpless, nor did he feel hopeless. Why? He did not feel helpless or hopeless because he had in his possession the very power of God for salvation. In other words, Paul had in his possession the gospel. He knew that having been entrusted with the gospel that he could, through the gospel, make a difference.

Hopefully this is how you feel in all your encounters with those in our life who may be spiritually dead and under the control of Satan. Hopefully you will not feel helpless or hopeless in light of the fact that in your possession is a life-changing message.

So just to make sure that there is no confusion about exactly about what the gospel is let us turn to **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** and consider what Paul said. **“Now I [Paul] make known to you, brethren, the gospel that I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, (2) by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. (3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, [And what was that?] that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”** This is Paul’s very succinct description of the gospel.

So let me ask you: Do you see any emphasis on people having to behave differently in order to be saved according to Paul? No! The gospel does not focus on what we need to do but rather on what Christ has done. Period!

And there is the problem with mobilizing the churches to drum up support for Proposition 8. When we make the world's behaviors an issue we are drawing attention away from God's solution, which is not about what the world is doing but what Christ has done.

Is this a problem? Absolutely! Let me ask you this question. Who are the only people who have the gospel message in their possession and are the stewards of it? It's us the church. So now let me ask you another question. What would be the worst thing we could possibly do in failing to be a good steward of this message? You might say, "The worst thing we could possibly do is to fail to share it." Certainly that would be a terrible thing but there is, I believe, something even worse. And what would that be?

What would be worse than failing to share the gospel message would be by our words or actions to undermine the message of the gospel and make it even more difficult for people to receive it.

And I believe that mobilizing churches in order to drum up support for Proposition 8 within our communities will, in fact, to some degree, do this very thing.

When we start to mobilize our churches to dress up spiritual zombies it will do one of two things. It will either irritate them or confuse them about the true nature of the gospel. And certainly this is not what we want to do. Our goal should always be the same goal as the Apostle Paul and that is to draw the world's attention to the gospel. But in order to do this and to make sure that we do nothing to undermine it we must have a firm handle on it. We must have a good grasp on this treasure that has been entrusted to us.

So, what is the gospel based on **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**? This is the Gospel: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This is the gospel.

Is this good news? Absolutely! Why? The gospel of Christ is good news because it trumpets Christ's victory over the power of sin. This is the heart of the gospel. How does the gospel of Christ trumpet Christ's victory over the power of sin?

First of all, the gospel trumpets Christ's victory over sin by detailing for us how He broke its power. And how did He do this? He did this by dying for our sins. What does **1 Corinthians 15:3** tell us? It tells us that Christ “**died for our sins.**”

The Scriptures teach us that we have all sinned (**Romans 3:23**). The Scriptures teach us that the wages of sin is death (**Romans 6:23**). The Scriptures teach us that there is nothing that we can do in and of ourselves to correct this hopeless condition (**Isaiah 64:6**). But this was not true of Christ. The gospel, as outlined by Paul, tells us that Christ died for our sins. He paid the debt that we could not pay and He paid that debt in full.

When Christ died for our sins and paid the debt that we owed to God He became the one and only door to heaven (John 10:9).

Isn't this exactly how Christ described Himself in **John 10:9**? Absolutely! What did He say? “**I am** [Not a door, but He said] **I am the door.**”

But how do we know that Christ has, in fact, become this door, this one and only door to heaven when He died for our sin?

Let me go back once again and look at the gospel as outlined by Paul **1 Corinthians 15** but this time we will not read just **verse 3** we will also read **verse 4**. “**For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.**” How do we know that Christ's offering satisfied the debt we owed and that He has now become the one and only door to heaven? We know that Christ's death satisfied the debt we owed to God because of our sin because after He and was buried He did not remain in the grave but was raised on the third day according to **1 Corinthians 15:4**.

So once again we find the gospel of Christ, as outlined by Paul in **1 Corinthians 15**, trumpeting Christ's victory, but this time the Gospel was not trumpeting Christ's victory over sin by telling us how He had secured it, as it had done **verse 3**. This time we find the gospel of Christ, as outlined by Paul in **1 Corinthians 15**, trumpeting Christ's victory over sin by telling us how He has confirmed it in **verse 4**.

So what is the gospel? This is the gospel as outlined by Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**: That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. This is the gospel or good news because it was this gospel and no other gospel that opened the door to heaven that makes it possible for those who are spiritually dead and under the control of Satan to enter and be saved.

But now we come to a most important question. How do people take advantage of what Christ has done? In other words, how do people get through this door that Christ has opened and get saved? Do they have to go into a treatment center and clean up their act before they enter the door? No! Do they have to be rehabilitated? No! There is nothing that they could possibly add to what Christ has already done for them. In fact, if we by our words or deeds infer anything other than this we have undermined the gospel of Christ. There is only one thing we want the world to focus on and this is the door that Christ has opened. But again how do people go through that door?

People go through the door and get saved by faith (Romans 1:16). Let us now go back and read the rest of **Romans 1:16**. **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone [What?] who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”**

So how do people go through the door that Christ opened? They have to go through the door that Christ opened in the same manner that any person goes through a door. They must first believe that there is a door and they must choose to go through.

The world is a mess. And there is much in this world to dislike, but as long as the world is dead in their trespasses and sins, and as long as the world is under the control of Satan we should have no expectation of the changing

the world through the ballot box. In other words, we should have no hope of changing the world by mobilizing churches to drum up support for Proposition 8.

Not only do I believe over time that such efforts would be unproductive, I also believe that those efforts over time will prove to be counter-productive. They will be counter-productive because I believe that over time they draw the world's attention away from God's real solution for the real problem.

May we by the grace of God point the world to the gospel of Christ, which is God's solution to the real problem facing this world.