

Preferences or Convictions
Romans 1:8-17
1-18-2026

In his commentary on Romans, Kenneth Boa wrote,

What do people in your sphere of influence hear about your church, your Bible study group, your mission organization—or about you? Much is said about Christians and their ministries today. Word spreads rapidly about increased attendance, about innovative programs, about multimedia presentations, about new facilities, about conferences and seminars. BUT how often does one hear about a church that is known for its faith...How many times does the secular world look at a church or believer and say, “They really seem to have a genuine spiritual life; they seem like what real Christians ought to be.”

In other words, would people say about us what they were saying about the church in Rome. A church Paul had never visited but had heard about, not because of their size or how dynamic their leader, the things our world seems to care so much about.

Instead, he heard about them because of the size of their faith.

He longed to visit and see for himself this church with a reputation for faith.

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”” (Romans 1:8–17)

Returning to the words of Kenneth Boa, when people hear or think of us, does our faith come to mind? That we seem like what Christian's ought to be because we follow the greatest commandment to love God AND Jesus said just as important, we love our neighbor as ourselves. Neighbor he defined in the story of the Good Samaritan not as the person who is like us but the one who is in need.

Or, like has become only too common, do they think first of our politics

What or who we may be against rather than the one we are for?

Do we care most about the things God cares about, people and such things as justice and mercy, love and compassion.

Micah 6:8 says, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

It can be tempting sometimes to treat the Bible like one day the authors decided to sit down and share some of their ideas about God.

Or that they wanted to write a textbook for people to study and discuss.

And so we read small portions for our daily devotional time, and we study it in bible study and hear it preached and taught in worship.

at times we may hear something that we like and agree with, something that catches our attention, and perhaps even touches our heart or pricks our conscience.

But then we close our bible and move on, leaving all that behind while we get on with the business of life.

It hasn't changed our beliefs and convictions, so much as it may have confirmed our preferences.

Which is what I want to talk about this morning, our convictions verses our preferences. Because in the end, it's not what we like or want to believe that matters, but what our lives show that reveals what we believe and our true convictions are.

While Romans is the most systematic of Paul's writings, sometimes reading more like a theological essay than a letter, it is not just words and ideas on paper meant to illicit discussion and argument.

Inspired by God, Romans reflects his strongly held conviction that people need the Lord and the salvation He offers in Christ.

It was his deeply held conviction that there is no one, Greek or non-Greek, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, male or female, whose life would not be better if they knew the Lord and therefore, he was willing to do what was necessary to get the word out to people, even at a personal cost.

As I shared last week, it is that same conviction which others, like Augustine and Luther, Calvin and Wesley, came to share, which God has used to enlarge his kingdom and even change the world.

after introducing himself to the Romans, Paul quickly moves on to his main subject, the gospel. :16-17 summarizes the theme for the book of Romans

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the

gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.””

You cannot understand the life of Paul apart from this conviction because it guided everything he did and wrote.

Andy Stanley wrote,

When I was in 7th grade, the school tried to scare us to death about using alcohol. We saw a film about a party where students danced and listened to music. One guy invited his friends to the back room for drinks, and another guy passed out. They couldn't revive him, so they called an ambulance. The paramedics rushed him to the hospital where someone called his parents. Mom was crying. Dad was crying. The doctors' stuck needles in his veins and tubes up his nose. The moral of the movie was, “Don't drink alcohol or they'll stick needles in your veins, tubes up your nose, and your parents will cry.

We were convinced that none of us would ever drink alcohol if that's what they were going to do to us. We even stayed clear of the water fountain, I think, for the rest of the day.

Then they brought in another film, whose plot was basically the same, but the moral this time was, “Don't take drugs.”

Another time we got to look at and touch the lung of some poor soul who had smoked all his life. The object was, “If you smoke, your lung will look like this, and kids will touch it.” We were convinced there in the seventh grade that we would never ever smoke cigarettes.

Another movie is still shown today in driver-education courses. It makes slasher films look like they are PG or G. Photographers have filmed the scenes of car wrecks before paramedics get there. From accident after accident, there are shots of crushed cars and mangled bodies. I thought the moral of that movie was, “Don't ever get in a car.”

We seventh graders were convinced that under no circumstance would we ever drink, smoke, take drugs, or drive recklessly, if at all. Yet soon after we entered high school, most of my friends were smoking. Just about everybody was drinking, and I lost several of my friends to drug overdoses.

How could we be convinced that something was deadly, unhealthy, and unwise, yet not act on our beliefs? Today many are involved in things a year or two ago you never dreamed you would do.

What happened to my friends in the seventh grade also happens to us. We have preferences. Yet we have very few convictions.

Most of us probably don't give much thought to how much of our life and behavior, even our words, merely reflect our preferences rather than deeply held convictions.

A preference expresses likes and dislikes. I like chocolate ice cream more than vanilla. This doesn't mean I won't eat vanilla if given the chance, it merely means I prefer the one over the other

A conviction expresses deeply held beliefs. It would be like believing chocolate is the only ice cream worth eating therefore I will never touch vanilla.

A preference is something we can give or take. A conviction is something that is part of us, it shapes us and our behavior.

A preference is something we might do when we feel like it. A conviction is something we do whether we feel like it or not.

A preference is something that would be nice. A conviction is something we consider necessary.

A preference is something we might do if nothing better comes along. A conviction spurs us to act without thought of what else may be available.

Preferences can be changed or abandoned with relative ease and usually little or no consequences.

Convictions on the other hand, are firmly ingrained and they cannot be changed without effort and without something deep inside of us changing as well.

Someone might argue about their preferences but they are willing to sacrifice for their convictions.

You can know someone's preferences without really knowing them as a person, but you will never really know someone until you come to understand their convictions, for it is these that define them.

Because of his convictions, his deeply held beliefs, Paul could declare, I am not ashamed of the gospel.

That was an amazing thing for him to say because everything around him was pressuring him to be embarrassed by such beliefs.

His own people, the Jews, rejected his convictions and beliefs.

The Greeks and educated scoffed at them.

The Romans often persecuted anyone who believed them.

In 1 Corinthians 1:23 Paul admitted that to the world around him, the gospel was a stumbling block to the Jews and considered foolishness to the Greeks.

Yet here Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

These weren't just words, grand ideas and preferences, but expressed his deeply held convictions.

Convictions which by the time he wrote Romans, had already led to his being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Damascus and Berea, laughed at in Athens, ridiculed as a fool in Corinth, stoned and left for dead at Lystra, and declared a blasphemer and lawbreaker in Jerusalem.

2 years previously he had written to the Corinthians telling them some of what his convictions had cost him, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Corinthians 11:24-29)

After facing all that, he now writes, I am not ashamed of the gospel and the reason is that it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

It can be easy to be vocal here at church, to talk about Jesus in Bible study and praise the Lord in worship.

But what about when we leave this place and are with those who do not share our faith and may even ridicule it, what then?

Do we speak up or keep mouths shut when someone starts making fun of Christianity and our Lord? When our friends want to know why we don't go out drinking and partying with them like we used to.

When our unbelieving spouse wants to know why we have to go to church every Sunday or why we want to give so much to God's work or why we read our bible and pray every day.

Do we speak up or keep quiet and our spiritual heads down?

Is the gospel really a conviction for us or merely a preference we hold to so long as it doesn't conflict with other things?

Paul uses 4 words to describe his conviction about the gospel.

1. The first has to do with his attitude towards the gospel – not **ashamed**
he is not ashamed of it because it is the power of God
Our convictions must be based not on human wisdom or popular thought but on the power of God
He alone is eternal and the one whom we will one day all stand before to give an account for our lives, So why should care more about what other people think?

2. The second deals with the gospels effectiveness - **salvation**
The gospel is the power of God for salvation
Salvation means deliverance
In the gospel, God has set us free from those things which would keep us enslaved and burdened, separated from Him
It is through the gospel that we are saved, so why should we give more credibility to some self-help book or influencer or talking head on TV

3. The third word concerns our response - **believe**
The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes
Faith is the key to our salvation
So why should we be tempted to turn to our works and personal effort or human wisdom instead

4. And fourth has to do with its ultimate purpose – **righteousness**
For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last
it is only the gospel that shows us how to live and be right with God
so why would we ignore or explain away his word to justify our actions

The righteous will live by their faith!

Paul's conviction that the gospel is essential for life with God, was seen in his concern for the Romans even though he had never met or been there
Concern which was seen through his prayers and his desire to finally meet them and not just teach them but learn from them as well

It wasn't just words, it was his convictions which were behind his sense of obligation to share the gospel with those he knew and those he didn't, churches he had started and those he only heard about, like in Rome.

he owed it to them, but even more, as he wrote in verse 1, he owed a debt to the God he served, the God who had called and appointed him an apostle, and the God who had set him apart for the work of the gospel

why should you and I care about people who aren't like us?
About people in faraway places like Africa or Asia or South America?

Or people here at home regardless of who they are
They are people who need the Lord just like we do.

Are they not also created in the image of God and loved by Him?
did not Jesus die for them just as much as he died for us?
And is not the gospel the power of God for the salvation for them also if they believe?

Gene Easly lived on the second floor of a Guatemalan apartment. One day he noticed a young girl walking with an elderly woman. Sometime later, the pair passed his window again, but this time, the young girl was carrying a bundle of sticks on her head. He said the girl particularly caught his attention because of her physical condition. She looked undernourished, very weak like she was about to collapse at any moment.

As the days passed, the young girls condition worsened., to the point where he began to fear for her life. She was almost stumbling as she walked. She looked ill and he wondered if she would survive. He said her little arms and legs were so thin that no one had to ask if she was eating right. It was obvious that she was suffering from a serious case of malnourishment. Seeing such a pitiful sight made him wonder, Why doesn't someone do something? Then it hit him. God seemed to turn the tables on him with the conviction, aren't you somebody? Why don't you do something?

In reflecting in this experience, he said, This is the condition of much of the church world. We are sitting, looking out the windows of our nice churches, seeing pitiful sights of a world in turmoil, and we are asking the question, Why doesn't somebody do something? And God is trying to speak to us, convict us, and tell us we are somebody. He wants us to be active in the harvest fields. No child of God was meant to be just an onlooker. When God shows us a need, we become responsible for that part off the harvest.

Caring about people, all people isn't to be a preference but a deeply held conviction as we become the hands and feet of Jesus entrusted with the gospel which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

Gene Easley and his wife responded to that inner voice from the Lord telling them, "You are somebody, you do something." They went to the grocery store, bought some staples such as beans and rice, along with some special treats including strawberry preserves and some candy. Then they drove around the area until they found that elderly woman and her 10-year-old granddaughter. and they returned many times after this, no longer sitting around gazing out their window but doing something.

Don't let your faith and actions become just a matter of preferences rather than convictions.

- Not just hoping our neighbor comes to the Lord but acting on the conviction that God may be placing us next door to tell them.
- Not waiting for the spirit to move us when we feel like it but acting on the conviction that because there is a need and God placed us here and given us the gifts and ability to help so we get involved.
- Not just talking about the importance of God's work but with the conviction to support it because we realize that all we have is a gift from God

After saying he was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, Paul then says for the righteous will live by their faith. It is a faith which is real that will shape our convictions to act.

I remember some of those films Andy Stanley wrote about from the 7th grade. I remember the response I and my friends had, which weren't really any different than his. We too were convinced that we would never participate in them. Yet by the time we left high school, many of my old friends would go out every week drinking and partying, some were strung out on drugs, and six months after graduation someone who at one time had been one of my closest friends, was killed in a car accident when he was driving while drunk, crossed the center dividing line and hit head on the car coming in the opposite direction.

Like Stanley and his friends, what at one time we had been convinced were deadly, unhealthy and unwise, may for a time have affected our preferences, but they never really became a part of our convictions.

We can believe something is true but until it becomes a conviction, it won't make a bit of difference.

Affirming in your mind that Jesus died for your sins and rose again on the third day isn't enough. It must go deeper than knowledge and become conviction, a part of us.

That starts with inviting him into your life, to be your savior and Lord.

Next week we will be celebrating baptism which is the image of the new life we discover in him.