

The Power of the Gospel

Bible Background • ROMANS 1

Printed Text • ROMANS 1:8–17 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 71:1–6, 17–24

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DISCERN the power of God as illustrated in Paul's faith, AFFIRM the power of God's salvation in family and friends, and PRAY for the salvation of the world, believing it is possible.

In Focus

Cheryl was struggling with a sense that God wanted her to make herself available for greater forms of service. Her period of intense prayer and fasting had revealed to her that God had more in store for her. As she looked at the more traditional areas of formal church ministry, she did not see herself in any of those roles. She realized that preparation for her ministry would probably involve enrolling in Bible college or seminary for training.

As Cheryl considered the possibilities for her life, she began to grow concerned about having to give up her current job and standard of living. "I worked so hard to achieve everything," she thought. She also began to fear that her fiancé, Dwayne, might not understand. "Maybe he'll call off the wedding!" she feared.

"Am I willing to give up my career and the man I love to do the Lord's will?" she asked herself over and over. Cheryl grew embarrassed and ashamed. How she wished she could readily respond, "yes!" But she knew she had not yet reached that point in her faith journey.

As she pondered the matter over and over, she could reach no simple solution. Finally, she realized that the dilemma was not hers to solve. She knew that the God she served would show her the right steps to take. "For now," she resolved, "I'll just take the first step. Whatever happens later, I have to trust that the Lord will work it all out."

What aspects of life hinder us from unabashedly following God's will for our lives and personal ministries? How do we push back against those hindrances?

Keep in Mind

"For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile" (Romans 1:16, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Salvation (Romans 1:16) soteria (Gk.)— Divine deliverance from sin and to holiness

B. Righteousness (v. 17) dikaiosune (Gk.)— State declared by God that places believers in right relationship with Him

Say It Correctly

Tertius. TER-she-us.

Phoebe. FEE-bee.

KJV

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

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

NLT

Romans 1:8 Let me say first that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith in him is being talked about all over the world.

9 God knows how often I pray for you. Day and night I bring you and your needs in prayer to God, whom I serve with all my heart by spreading the Good News about his Son.

10 One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you.

11 For I long to visit you so I can bring you some spiritual gift that will help you grow strong in the Lord.

12 When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours.

13 I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to visit you, but I was prevented until now. I want to work among you and see spiritual fruit, just as I have seen among other Gentiles.

14 For I have a great sense of obligation to people in both the civilized world and the rest of the world, to the educated and uneducated alike.

15 So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach the Good News.

16 For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.

17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”

The People, Places, and Times

Epistles. Following the letter-writing customs of the day, epistles were written on sheets of papyrus with ink and a reed pen, then rolled or folded, and often sealed for privacy and authentication. The Christian community employed the members of their churches as carriers of the letters. Thus four people were usually involved in any New Testament letter: the writer, the secretary, the carrier, and the readers. In the case of Romans, we have the names of all these people. Writer: Paul (1:1), secretary: Tertius (16:22); carrier: likely Phoebe (16:1-2); and audience: the Roman church (1:7).

Paul. Even before his conversion, Paul was instrumental in causing the church to spread from its Jerusalem roots. His participation in the death of Stephen, the deacon, and frenzied persecution of believers after the Resurrection caused them to flee Jerusalem and take the Gospel to other parts of the world.

After his conversion (Acts 9:1-19), Paul embarked on three missionary journeys spreading the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Not only did the apostle personally establish countless churches throughout the world, he also wrote at least 13 epistles that make up a significant part of the New Testament.

How have you changed from who you used to be or stepped out of your comfort zone to share the Gospel or minister to others?

Background

The Apostle Paul had never visited the church in Rome, but he greatly desired to do so. The Roman church was strategically located for world evangelism. In his letter to the Romans, Paul does not address any particular need, problem, or doctrinal error. However, in the Epistle to the Romans, Paul presents a deeply theological discussion of major Christian doctrine. The church was renowned for its faith and spiritual maturity (Romans 1:8). The apostle's purpose was to establish the young church in the faith as deeply as possible.

The members of the church were primarily Gentile, with a Jewish minority. This may account for Paul's reminder regarding Christianity's Jewish roots and God's unchanging plan for them (Romans 9-11). The letter to the Roman church plainly sets forth God's plan for both the nation of Israel and the Gentiles.

At-A-Glance

1. Paul's Prayer and Request (Romans 1:8-13)
2. Paul's Theme (vv. 14-17)

In Depth

1. Paul's Prayer and Request (Romans 1:8-13) When Paul prayed for the Christians in Rome he prayed with two things on his mind. One was thanksgiving and the other was a request. And each one had something to do with the Gospel of God. As always the apostle begins by thanking God. He is particularly thankful for the church's faith. In all but one of Paul's letters to the churches, he expresses his gratefulness to God for his fellow Christians.

Because of the city's connections, believers throughout the Roman empire knew of the faith of the believers in Rome. Paul had never visited the church, but he, too, was aware of their great faith. The Roman believers demonstrated their faith by their passion for Christ and their love and devotion to one another. In the heart of an immoral, unjust, and pagan society, the Roman Christians boldly proclaimed the Gospel of Christ and lived virtuous lives. Devout Israelites might spend several hours each day in prayer and would pray at different periods of the day. Paul mentioned the Roman believers "I always pray for is the opportunity" (v. 10, NLT). There were times when the apostle was incarcerated or incapacitated and could not evangelize. However, there was never a time when He could not pray. Constant faithful prayer is the greatest service anyone can give the kingdom of God.

Paul's request of God was simple: he desired to visit the Church in Rome (v. 10). He had never been to the city. He had made plans to come to Rome, but time and again his plans fell through (v. 13). In his prayers, Paul expressed his longing to visit the city to "impart some spiritual gift to you." Paul desired that the Holy Spirit would use his gifts to bless the believers in Rome, and Paul expresses his belief that the Roman believers would also be a blessing to him (v. 12). Whenever Christians come together there should be mutual blessings. Everyone should give and receive. All believers regardless of ethnicity share a common hope, purpose, and mission.

How does prayer impact your personal Christian walk?

2. Paul's Theme (vv. 14-17) Paul was aware of his Christian obligation to people regardless of ethnicity or beliefs. The same Jesus who died for him died for all. That is why he was so eager to preach the Gospel in Rome. Those in Rome need not think that Paul did not have much confidence in the Gospel which he had been preaching. Rather, the Gospel was the cause of Paul's glory and he was honored to be able to proclaim it. Paul did proclaim the Gospel, and did

so with full confidence in the ability (power) of this God-given message to bring salvation to all who would but believe (v. 16).

Paul simply states, "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (v. 16). Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel for two reasons: "for it is the power of God unto salvation" (v. 16). Whenever believers share the Gospel message with an unbeliever, they tap into the unlimited power of God. The God of salvation sent the Good News of Christ so that people would believe and receive salvation. Paul is also not ashamed of the Gospel because through it "is the righteousness of God revealed" (v. 17). The righteousness that comes from God restores believers to a right relationship with God. Perfect righteousness is not the result of good deeds. Rather, it is a righteousness "that is by faith." Faith is both a single act and a continuing attitude. As we continue in our Christian walk, our loyalty and obedience matures to trust and devotion. And faith becomes the driving force in our lives, "as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (v. 17).

What practical steps do you take to live by faith?

Search the Scriptures

1. What aspect of the Roman Christian's relationship with God was Paul especially thankful for? (v. 8)
2. Why was the Apostle Paul so anxious to visit the church in Rome? (v. 11)
3. How did Paul describe the Gospel and who benefited from it? (v. 16)
4. What reasons did Paul give to prove he was "ready" to preach the Gospel? (see Romans 1:14-17)

Discuss the Meaning

Paul declared that the Gospel reveals the power of God for salvation to all regardless of ethnicity. Do African Americans have a responsibility to share the Good News with people of other races? What about in other nations? How can we accomplish this international evangelism?

Liberating Lesson

Today's lesson on how Paul viewed his evangelistic mission raises questions about modern evangelism. Some say we need a new message in modern inner cities because the Christian Gospel is a White folk's Gospel. They claim that the Gospel is ineffective in dealing with the stress and turmoil of today's urban centers. Based on Paul's view of the Gospel, how would you respond to these critics?

Application for Activation

Paul insists that the Gospel is for all people, reminding Christians of the Great Commission's understanding that we will go into all the world (Matthew 28:19-20). This week, write down a prayer seeking God's will for how you are to participate in the salvation of the world. Pray that prayer each day this week and listen for God's answer.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Romans 1:8-17 **8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.** The introduction is complete. “First” in this case does not refer to priority but rather means “in the first place.” The phrase “I thank” is from the Greek word eucharisteo (eew-kharees- TEH-oh) which is better translated as “I give thanks.” The present tense indicates a continuous rendering of gratitude. Paul’s gratitude to God, particularly for fellow Christians, is always uppermost in his thoughts. In all but one of his epistles to the churches, Paul expresses thankfulness for believers. The only exception is the epistle to the Galatians, who had abandoned the Gospel of grace for an opposing teaching (Galatians 1:6).

Giving thanks to God is an expression of joy and therefore a fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22). Paul understood this truth and so offered up his thanks “through Jesus Christ.” The apostle knew that every good thing that happened, every grace he received and every Christian he met was a blessing from God through his union with Christ. So every act of worship, praise, or thanksgiving was offered up to God through Christ.

The phrase “your faith” can be interpreted in two ways. It could be a reference to the strength of their faith. However, the context seems better served by referring to their Christianity. The way they lived their lives, their Christian walk, was being “spoken of throughout the whole world.” The phrase “is spoken of,” from the Greek verb katangelo (ka-ta-ang-GELL-oh) is better translated “is being proclaimed.” The “world” in this case does not mean the whole world, but rather the Roman Empire.

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; 10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. Paul uses an interesting word to describe his service to God—latreuo (lah-TREW-oh) which literally means to serve as a priest. It is the Greek word used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) to refer to the service of priests in the Temple. Paul said that he served God “with my spirit.” He considered all Christian service to be an act of worship. Therefore, true

Christian service must originate in the spirit because “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Paul prayed continuously. In Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, he encouraged them to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Here Paul demonstrates that he practiced what he preached.

In the introduction of the Roman epistle, the apostle reveals two elements of his prayer life: his thankfulness (v. 8) and his concern for others (v. 9). When Paul says, “I make mention of you” he does not mean the church in general, but he is specifically referring to the Roman church by name. At the end of this letter, Paul mentions by name 26 members of the Roman church—a church that he had never visited before (Romans 16). From this, we can conclude that personal prayer for individuals should always be specific. Along with praying for others, Paul also requests for himself. He wanted to have “a prosperous journey” to Rome. Paul also reveals submissiveness in his prayer life. Paul made all his requests “by” or “in” the will of God. Thus, the best and surest way of life is always in the will of God. In relying on this divine formula, Paul confirms the teaching of the Apostle John, “If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). Paul also follows the example of Christ, the Great Apostle, who prayed, “not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39).

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; 12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. The apostle’s prayer reflects the desires of his heart. The phrase “I long for you” literally means “I am homesick for you.” Paul’s desire to visit Rome was so strong that it was comparable to homesickness even though he has never been there before. The motivation for his great longing is three-pronged: “that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift,” “[that] ye may be established,” and “that I may be comforted together with you.”

Paul uses the term “spiritual gift” term in both the natural and spiritual sense. In the natural sense, Paul wanted to share the Gospel message. In the spiritual sense, the apostle refers to the gifts that transcend the ordinary workings of nature known as the “grace gifts” as described in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

The reason Paul gives for the impartation of these “grace gifts” is so that “ye may be established.” Note the passivity of the phrase. Paul does not say so that “I” may establish, but rather that “ye” may be established. With all his gifts and eloquent speech, Paul knew that only God could develop, strengthen, and establish Christian character. Paul is not implying any spiritual weakness on their part nor superior spiritual strength for himself. In fact, it is his hope that they will share in a common strengthening. The word “comfort” from the Greek *sumparakaleo* (soom-pa-ra-ka-LEH-oh) is best rendered “strengthen together.” Paul hopes that both he and the Roman Christians will be mutually strengthened by his visit.

13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. The emphatic phrase “I would not have you ignorant” is one of Paul’s favorites.

Paul uses this phrase five times in his epistles (Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). Each time, the apostle employs the phrase to call special attention to what follows.

In this case, Paul calls attention to how often he had “purposed” to visit Rome. “But was let hitherto” is an old English expression that is hardly used anymore. In this usage, it means “hindered” or “prevented.” It must have appeared to Paul that there were forces working to hinder his visit to the city. These could have been sinister forces of evil, hoping to slow the progress of the Gospel, or it could have been the protection and guidance of the Spirit (Acts 16:6-7).

The apostle’s eventual journey to Rome actually began with a visit to Jerusalem to settle the issue of Gentile circumcision. After his meeting with the church elders, some Jews lied on Paul and incited a riot in the city. Paul was arrested and later kept in protective custody (Acts 21:15–23:10). While Paul was in custody, Christ appeared to him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). Before finally making it to Rome, the apostle would languish under house arrest for two years (Acts 24:27) and be shipwrecked on the island of Malta (27:1— 28:16). In spite of all the hindrances, Paul knew that God wanted him to go to Rome, and the apostle purposed in his spirit to go there.

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. 15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. Thus, Paul prayed to visit Rome so that he could preach the Gospel in the capital city of the empire. He had a debt to pay to all humanity, a debt that could never be satisfied. This was a debt to proclaim the Gospel of God. However high or however low, wise Greek or uneducated barbarian, Paul saw them all as fit subjects for the message of Christ. The term “barbarians” referred to those who did not speak Greek. While it did have some connotations to lacking the “civilized” nature of Greek society, Paul cannot be using it to insult here, since he is confessing his debt to them.

The society of Rome was not unlike our society. We too are faced with the so-called cultured “Greeks” and those referred to by the so-called cultured folks as “barbarians.” We too have the educated and the illiterate. Yet, to one and all, the Gospel of God is the only hope of salvation, temporal as well as eternal. The power to save comes from God through the message of the Gospel. All we need to do is tell the story, and our society will be saved.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. The preposition “for” marks the transition from the introduction to the heart of the epistle. In these two verses, Paul states the purpose and theme of his letter to the Roman church— the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Good News of Jesus Christ can be summarized like this: God loves humanity; humanity is essentially sinful; Christ paid the price for our sin; you must be born again.

The language of Paul's declaration, "I am not ashamed," implies that it required some courage to boldly proclaim what was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:23). The word "ashamed" is a translation of the Greek word epaischunomai (eh-pies-KHOO-noo-my), which means to have feelings of fear or shame that would prevent a person from taking action. Paul's courage sprang from his knowledge concerning the Gospel. Paul knew that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and it reveals the righteousness of God.

Paul's initial statement about the Gospel relates its power. The keyword here is "is." The apostle does not say that the Gospel has or exerts power. He proclaims that "it is the power." The word "power" comes from the Greek word dunamis (DOO-nah-mees), from which we derive the word dynamite. It means the inherent strength or power residing in a thing by its nature. Therefore the Gospel is the inherent power of God exerted in the salvation of humanity. The basic idea of "salvation" (Gk. soteria, so-teh-REE-ah) is deliverance. It speaks of the divine deliverance from sin to holiness. Salvation is a gift of God's grace that is based on Christ's death (Romans 3:25), resurrection (5:10), and continued intercession on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25). The only requirement for salvation is faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22-25).

This great salvation comes to believers in three stages. In the initial stage, believers are saved from the penalty of sin (Romans 6:23). In its present stage, salvation delivers believers from the power of sin in our daily lives. God accomplishes our deliverance from the power of sin by filling us with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 5:16), which brings us into a new personal relationship with God (John 1:12-13). In the future stage, salvation delivers believers from the actual presence of sin (Revelations 21:1-8).

God's great salvation is available to everyone who believes. As believers, we receive and live our salvation through faith, which is both the acceptance of the truth of the Gospel and complete trust in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore, faith is both a one-time act and a continuing attitude that grows and is strengthened. Paul's second statement about the Gospel is this: "for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." The word "righteousness" (Gk. dikaiosune, dee-keyeoh-SOO-nay) refers to the restoration of right relations between God and believers. No one can approach God based on his or her righteousness because humanity has no righteousness (Romans 3:10). Therefore, God imputes or credits believers with His righteousness through our faith in Christ (Romans 4:5). The phrase "from faith to faith" indicates a progression of faith from a lower to a higher degree (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18). Faith is the key to initial salvation and to living saved lives.

Paul was able to say "I am not ashamed of the gospel," because he had seen the Gospel's power unleashed in the lives of many believers. This power had freed them from the power of sin and death and empowered them to live godly lives. This same power is available today to all who believe.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Apollos and Paul, Builders
(1 Corinthians 3:1-11)

TUESDAY

Entrusted to Take Gospel to Gentiles
(Galatians 2:1-10)

WEDNESDAY

Grace and Peace to All
(Romans 1:1-7)

THURSDAY

God's Righteous Wrath
(Romans 1:18-23)

FRIDAY

God's Actions Are Fair and Just
(Romans 1:24-32)

SATURDAY

God's Righteous Actions for Saints, Sinners
(2 Peter 2:4-9)

SUNDAY

The Gospel Changes Jews and Gentiles
(Romans 1:8-17)