

Christ, The Power Of God

Clearing the Debt

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The book of Romans, chapter 1, and we read from the beginning of the chapter.

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, 2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) 3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made 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 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: 6 Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: 7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest

in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: 32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Amen. May God bless his word to our hearts.

We look this evening at verse 16, reading from verse 15 down to verse 18.

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. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Our theme is "Christ, The Power Of God." Christ, the power of God. Probably many people in this district in some way or another have been made aware that Christians believe that they need to be saved. They know that these Christians talk about people being saved and that they are regarded as needing to be saved. But how many actually know what it means, what salvation is? Do all men and women need salvation? If so,

salvation from what? Can men save themselves? If only God can save, how does he do it? If Christ died on the cross to save sinners, what is the connection between what he did and salvation and going to heaven? And who is it who are saved by him? These are all vitally important questions and yet very few are actually asking them. Vastly more people will have commented or discussed the subject of the economic recession or perhaps something more trivial still, the ups and downs of some celebrity and their personal life, but few, few have asked, "What must I do to be saved and how can I be sure of going to heaven and not hell when I die?" And yet this question is of the greatest importance because death is sure.

We know that and yet how easy to live as if we didn't know it. We go to funerals and we know that one day it will be our turn and yet many many people live with death and what lies beyond pushed out of their minds and their minds are engrossed in lesser things. The purpose of these meetings is to address these vitally important, however unpopular, questions because the minister here and the Lord's people here, the Christians here in Dromara want the people of this district to know the answers, and not only to know the answers but to believe those answers and to come to faith in Jesus Christ and life everlasting in him.

Now this book of Romans is that part of the Bible which gives us the fullest and most systematic presentation of God's way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul knew some of the members of the church at Rome but he had not yet been there and he greatly desired to do so, to visit them; he indicates that in verses 9 to 12 in this first chapter. And so in this letter, as well as expressing the desire to see them, he gives also a systematic statement of that gospel, that good news from God that he is so willing to preach to them at Rome also.

So verse 15, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." And then he gives this parted statement as to why he is ready to preach the gospel at Rome and it consists of four "fors," that is, four number use of the word "for," f-o-o-r. He says, verse 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. **For** therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. **For** the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." So these verses tell us why the gospel is nothing to be ashamed of because it is the power of God unto salvation, they tell us why it is the power of God unto salvation because in it is revealed the righteousness of God, and it tells us why we need this righteousness of God because the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Let us look, then, at these things.

Firstly, the gospel of Christ as the power of God unto salvation. God is almighty, God created all things by the word of his power, but God displays his power as well as his love and grace and wisdom in the salvation of sinners. The power of God in saving sinners works through this gospel. The apostles says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation." God saves sinners through the

proclamation and the spreading of this gospel and only this gospel. That means multi-faith must be rejected. There are not many ways to heaven. The idea is almost assumed today that it doesn't really matter what religion you follow as long as you are sincere. Sincerity does not save. Sincerity in a false religion does not save. However unpalatable and however much it's assumed otherwise, the scriptures teach that there is one way to God and only one that God saves, his power to salvation saves, his power to salvation operates through this gospel of Jesus Christ. And the Apostle Paul expresses himself very strongly on this in the book of Galatians 1:6, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

That is very explicit and needs nearly no explanation. The apostles says there is one true gospel, any other is no gospel, and if anyone preaches another gospel, let him be accursed. This means not only that the Muslim or the Hindu, but even those who profess Christianity but who believe a different gospel from that taught in the Bible as the word of God, they will not go to heaven. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." The apostle says elsewhere, "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

But perhaps you say, "That's not the general view today, we've moved on from that kind of bigotry and narrowness." Well, you can call it bigotry and narrowness but it is the biblical teaching and if we aren't going to get our Christianity from the Bible, there certainly is nowhere else to get it from. If you think that you can have forgiveness of sin without Christ, then you have certainly never known Christ. If you think that your sins can be forgiven without Jesus Christ, then your sins are not forgiven because you do not have Jesus Christ.

The apostle in chapter 10 of this book says, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved...and how shall they call on him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" There must be this gospel for any sinner to be saved for the power of God to operate unto salvation. There must be a hearing and a believing of this gospel.

We also learn that God's power is declared in the content of the gospel. It is the gospel of Christ. Christ, the second person of the Godhead, became a man though without ceasing to be God. The Lord Jesus Christ was God and man, two distinct natures, one person forever. We can hardly take that in but it was so, and he lived a life that was without sin and yet he suffered and died bearing the wrath of God, the punishment of sin, in the place of guilty sinners. That's why Christ died on the cross and Christ having died, dieth no more. He rose from the dead and in his rising from the dead, God was declaring that the punishment of sin had been fully borne, that Christ had borne the punishment that sin deserved to the full, and there the power of God was displayed, showing that Christ had fully paid the debt to the justice of God. When we think of this clearing the debt, to

whom is the debt owed? The answer is to God and to the justice of God. Christ came to bear God's wrath to pay the debt due to the justice of God on behalf of sinners.

But not only is God's power displayed in Christ's resurrection that is declared in the gospel but this same power of God is shown in the conversion of sinners to Christ. In Ephesians, the book of Ephesians 1, we see that the same power that raised the Lord Jesus works in connection with the gospel in the hearts of men and women. Ephesians 1:19, "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." There in chapter 2, verse 1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Verse 5 of chapter 2, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)." That same power that was displayed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ accompanies the preaching of the gospel when God gives life to a sinner dead in his sins and causes him to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and God's saving power operates through the preaching of the gospel.

No wonder the Apostle Paul wasn't ashamed of the gospel because it is through this gospel that God mightily changes sinners and brings them from darkness to light, from sin and Satan, to God. Paul was not ashamed of this gospel and neither must we be. If any religion would do, then why bother having meetings like this? If any religion will do, why have missionary endeavor? Why not just leave people alone, they're alright anyway? But they're not and you're not without Christ because any religion won't do. And the reason we're having these meetings is because we long to see God's power bringing men and women into a state of salvation and on the way to heaven through the gospel as it is proclaimed.

You see, hearing it is not enough. Hearing it does not save. There must be a believing of it, and the text tells us that, "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." God's power when it accompanies the gospel causes men and women to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. God's saving power is displayed in bringing sinners to faith in Jesus Christ and they alone are saved through the power of God working through this gospel. Other people hear but they're no better for it. In fact, they're worse because they have this sin added to all their sins, that they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and loved darkness rather than light.

Secondly, the revelation of God's provided righteousness. The revelation of God's provided righteousness. We now know why the apostles is ready to preach the gospel in Rome and was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation. Now he explains why God's saving power accompanies this gospel and it is because in it God reveals his righteousness. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth... For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." What does it mean that the gospel reveals God's righteousness? Righteousness is an attribute of God, a characteristic of God. It's an element of God's character. It's part of what God is like, he is righteous. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works.

God is righteous and what God is, does, commands and approves is righteousness. Atheists may talk of right and wrong but it has no meaning. The terms right and wrong have no meaning apart from God. We begin with God. He is righteous and what he does is righteous, what he commands and approves is righteous, and God's works show that he is righteous. But that's not all it means here. It's true that the gospel shows that God is righteous but it's saying more than that, it's saying that the gospel actually makes known in Christ a righteousness wrought out by Christ on behalf of sinners. The gospel, the good news entails a declaration that in Christ there is a righteousness which is imputed to those who believe. Let me just open that up a little bit. The Lord Jesus Christ lived a perfect life. No one else has. Our lives are full of sin. But the Lord Jesus Christ also bore the punishment of sin, a punishment that for those who are not saved by him will be borne in hell. But the punishment of sin Christ bore not for any sin of his own, for he had none, but on behalf of all his people who trust in his name.

So Christ kept God's law and bore the penalty, the punishment of the transgression of that law. That's the righteousness of God that is made known in the gospel, and that righteousness of God wrought out by Christ, preached in the gospel, is imputed to every sinner who believes on his name. You say, "Imputed, what does that mean? I don't know what it means." Well, perhaps you do when you think about it. It means for something to be reckoned as or reckoned to the account of someone. If the bank makes a mistake and credits someone else's money to your account, it's reckoned as in your account but it's not yours. Or sometimes the term impute is used negatively when someone feels wrongly accused in their motive, people will say, "You're imputing bad motives to me." That means you're attributing to me, you're accounting, you're treating as belonging to me motives that are not mine.

So that's the idea of imputation, reckoning to the account of a person. Well, what this is telling us is that those who believe on Jesus Christ, all that Christ did as the substitute of sinners in keeping that law of God which we have broken in our thoughts and words and actions so many times, and all that he did in bearing the punishment of sin as the substitute of sinners, all of that is imputed, reckoned to the account of those sinners who trust in him. And this gospel declares to sinners that for those who believe there is a God-provided righteousness in Christ which will be imputed, reckoned to their account. No other so-called gospel will tell you about that. That's why it's this gospel that is the power of God unto salvation.

The Apostle Paul speaks about this righteousness, this imputed righteousness, this righteousness of Christ in his obedience and bearing of guilt, imputed, reckoned to the account of those who believe on his name. He speaks of it in Philippians 3. In verse 7 he says, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." That is God's provided righteousness imputed to those who believe.

There the apostle uses the idea, it's the language used in the book of Acts when Paul was involved in a shipwreck and they threw the heavy cargo overboard because of the storm in order to try and save the ship. That's the idea in that passage we've just read, that the apostle as a Pharisee before he was a Christian, he trusted all kinds of things that he did, he had all kinds of things that he trusted in that would make him righteous before God. But he came to see that they wouldn't and that he must give up, he must throw overboard all false hopes and trust Christ and only Christ for acceptance with God that he may be found in his righteousness, having his spotless, perfect righteousness reckoned as his.

So it is for any of us. Christ is no one's half-savior. If you're trusting in your own efforts or your church connection, or whatever, your decency as a neighbor or whatever, that somehow that will help contribute to your acceptance with God, you'll never be saved, you'll never be forgiven, and you'll never be accepted with God unless and until you give up all these hopes and trust only in Christ.

And when it says "to everyone that believes," this is expanded on later in this little passage, verse 17, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." This righteousness of God is righteousness wrought out by Christ in his perfect sinless life and his bearing of the guilt of sin preached in the gospel. It says it's from faith to faith, what does that mean, from faith to faith? Well, it means it's by faith, that is, it is through believing that this righteousness is reckoned to the account of sinners. Okay, so it's by faith but what does "to faith" mean? Well, the apostle is saying that not only is it by faith that this righteousness is received and reckoned to the account of sinners, but it's reckoned to the account of those same sinners who believe. In other words, my faith won't result in your being declared not guilty and being forgiven, your faith won't result in your next-door neighbor being declared not guilty. It is by faith and it is to those who actually believe. It is non-transferrable. There's no bulk ticket, as it were. When I was a boy or a teenager and if you went to a football match, you would see youngsters trying to get in through the turnstile in the crowd, they tried to squeeze in with others. I'm sure that couldn't happen now but they tried it. But you see, there's no way of getting this secondhand or getting through in the crowd.

In the parable that Christ taught about the marriage feast of the king's son, it says when the king came he saw a man without the wedding garment and he was cast out. A man. It's not telling us there will only be one or few, it's simply saying that among those who claimed to be the true guests at the wedding feast, there was this man who wasn't and he was cast out. The king didn't say, "Well, he's just one, we'll let it go." He was cast out. And without faith in Jesus Christ, it doesn't matter what you profess. If your hope is not only in Christ, then this righteousness of God, this God-provided righteousness will not be imputed or reckoned to your account and your sins will not be forgiven, and you will not be declared not guilty, and you will be held guilty for all your sins before the judgment seat of God.

So the apostle is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation. It's the power of God unto salvation because in it is made known God's provided

righteousness in Christ which is reckoned to the account of every sinner who believes. But then thirdly, the need we all have of God's provided righteousness for sinners. The need we all have of God's provided righteousness for sinners. The text goes on, verse 17, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." The apostle quotes from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk to confirm what he said. Then verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Perhaps you say, "This is all very interesting and, no doubt, the Apostle Paul had some interesting things to say, but really it's not relevant to me. Maybe scandalous people, terrorists, people like that are wild sinners, maybe they need to hear this but not me. Why do I need Christ's righteousness reckoned to my account? I'm doing rather well as I am." Well, this verse tells you that you're not, that whatever you think of yourself, that however righteous you might consider yourself, in the sight of God you are guilty and damnable. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and that includes you.

The apostle goes on to show that this ungodliness and unrighteousness belongs to all men. He shows in verse 19 to the end of this chapter that the Gentiles are all sinners, and there in chapter 2, he shows that the Jews are all sinners, and then he comes to a conclusion in chapter 3, verse 10, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." Verse 20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Verse 23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." And all the argumentation up those verses is to show the Gentiles are sinners, the Jews are sinners, there are no exceptions, all are liable to the wrath of God, those who had the written word, those who didn't.

In the rest of this chapter 1, he's showing that even the Gentiles who didn't have the written word of God, there are some things that they ought to have known, they ought to have known that God is eternal and almighty. So in verse 19, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen." He's saying the creation, which we can see, tells us things about God that we can't see. "Being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

And he goes on to describe their idolatry, how they made idols, they made images and called them gods out of images like birds and beasts and four-footed things, and he says the reason they do that is because they don't like God as he really is and so they pretend that God is how they would like him. More manageable. More palatable. More acceptable. He doesn't say that these pagans with their idols and so on, they're seeking the living God but just haven't found the way yet. He doesn't say they worship idols because they want to know God as he really is but because they don't. They don't like to retain God in their knowledge and so they pretend that God is different to what he really is.

You say, "Well, that's very interesting but that's talking about pagans who worship idols." And there's plenty of that too, perhaps not physically making images of God but that

happens too, but people want their idea of God. Would you rather believe in a God who just makes everybody happy, a God who doesn't bother about sin? And you can find men who claim to be ministers of the gospel who will tell you that that's what God is like. It's a lie. But why would you prefer that? Well, because you're like these Gentiles who made their own images. God as he really is, is the God who sends this gospel, this gospel of Christ, the substitute bearing the wrath in the place of sinners. "This is the real God, this God who doesn't send sinners to hell and doesn't punish sin." You can cling to him all your days but he doesn't exist. "It is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment," and the God you will face is not this imaginary God of the liberal churchman, it's the God of the scriptures who does punish sin but has sent his Son to bear the guilt of sin that those who believe on him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The chapter goes on to describe the results of this ungodliness, this idolatry, in the unrighteousness of the conduct of the pagan world. It describes the sins that were committed and that God gave them up to a reprobate mind, that is, a desensitized, an undiscerning mind. And if we may say so, he describes sexual perversion as an effect of being given over to a reprobate mind. Things that are obvious cease to be obvious. People say this country is ready for judgment, so it is but the judgment has already started because things that were understood once as obvious, things that were seen as obviously unnatural and wrong are not so obvious now. That's because God is giving us over to desensitized consciences so that even what unconverted men could once see they can't see now.

But God's judgments in this world are but a forerunner of his judgment in the world to come. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme example of love and compassion, spoke very fully about hell. Men think they can be more compassionate than Christ by ignoring the reality of hell. Men who won't tell the truth don't love men, they love themselves. There is a hell and without Christ as our Savior we all deserve to go there, and without Christ as our Savior we would go there, and you will go there without Christ.

So the apostle is showing he's not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation. God saves through this gospel and God saves through this gospel because in this gospel he makes known to sinners a righteousness wrought out by Christ that is reckoned to the account of those who believe. And all men need to hear this gospel because in themselves all men are unrighteous and guilty before God. No one goes to heaven without learning that they deserve to go to hell. No one comes to Christ as the Savior who doesn't think they need saving. That's why chapter 3, verse 20 says, "by the law is the knowledge of sin." You say, "I'm not a sinner. I'm not really guilty." But by your standards maybe you're not, by society's standards maybe you're not, but God isn't interested in your standards or society's standards, he's not interested in consensus, the only standard that matters with God is his and by his standard there is none righteous, no, not one. You're no exception. You are a sinner.

You do deserve damnation from God forever but in the gospel there is made known God's righteousness in Christ, in the gospel you are told of a Savior who unlike us never sinned, not even in his thoughts, in the gospel you're told of a Savior who bore the

punishment of sin in the place of guilty sinners and cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This is the Savior you need and this is the Savior you must seek, and it is this Savior who alone can take away your dreadful guilt in the sight of God and make you accepted with God, and it is this Savior who says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters...yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." How can you buy without money? By coming to God trusting entirely in Jesus Christ knowing that you have nothing, absolutely nothing that can contribute to your acceptance with God. You must come to Christ and seek mercy from the God of heaven by trusting in his Son Jesus Christ, the one who came to seek and to save that which was lost and who saves sinners and who says to sinners in this world, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Amen.