

The Power of God

Romans 1:8-17

What comes to mind when you hear the word “power”?

There are various kinds of power in the world.

There is political power, the kind that politicians crave.

There is the power that comes from money, the sort that we get from having a well-paying job.

There is human power, either physical or mental.

There is gas and electric and solar power.

There is the power of big tech.

We all use power to enhance our lives. We all rely upon power to give us what we want.

The problem is that the powers of the world are constantly in flux, ever changing. And so, we fear. We might fear the transfer of governmental power.

We might fear the lack of a trustworthy media or fair elections.

Or we might fear losing our job, or losing our health.

It is in the midst of our swirling storm of fears that I want to speak of another power. One that is in some way far less predictable than the powers of this world, and yet far more reliable and unchanging.

It is “The Power of God.” The Omnipotent Power of God.

Look at verse 16.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation

Do you believe that the Gospel IS the Power of God?

The Omnipotent Power of God unto salvation? Or do you think that the Gospel is weak and frail and must be propped up in one way or another? Paul says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel BECAUSE it is the Power of God to Salvation.

Every power, every force that stands in opposition to your salvation meets its match in the power of God.

In uncertain times we often ask the question, “What can I do?”

There is a place for action. But more than trying to gain more control over the powers of this world, God calls you to rest in his power – his full and complete power which alone is able to carry you all the way to eternal salvation.

Read Romans 1:8-17

Today we are going to look at six truths concerning the power of God.

1. The Power of God is working to build the Church.

⁸ First,

I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you,

because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

Paul begins by thanking God that the Church in Rome exists.

If there is a true Church of God, it exists by the power of God.

The Church is made up of people who willingly admit the failure of their own righteousness before God.

The Church is made up of people who rely upon the shed blood of a man who lived 2,000 years ago to give them peace with God.

The Church is made up of people who are daily striving to submit their personal desires to the will of God.

The Church is made up of people who willingly give up things in this world to lay hold of the treasures of a world that they have never seen.

These things are not natural.

Only the power of God can produce them.

And so, Paul gives thanks to God for the Roman Christians.

Their faith has been reported all over the world.

Paul is not going to Rome to establish the Church there. It has already been established. Paul's purpose is to encourage an already existing church, and one that is in many ways doing quite well.

2. The Power of God is active when Saints gather together.

9 For God is my witness,
 whom I serve with my spirit
 in the gospel of his Son,
 that without ceasing I mention you
10 always in my prayers,
 asking that somehow by God's will
 I may now at last succeed in coming to you.
11 For I long to see you,
 that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you -
12 that is,
 that we may be mutually encouraged
 by each other's faith,
 both yours and mine.

Paul wants to go to Rome, to see the Roman Christians. He wants to visit them, in person. Why?

He believes that his being present with the Christians in Rome will result in their being strengthened and encouraged.

It is difficult to argue that there has ever been any single document that has been more used of God in the building of his kingdom throughout the last 2,000 years than the Book of Romans. Does the Reformation even occur without this letter. Countless Christians throughout

history have been saved through this letter. We are here today continuing to be blessed by this letter.

But, I am convinced that if you were to ask Paul which would be more strengthening to the faith of the Romans, his letter or his actual bodily presence, he would have emphatically stated: His bodily presence.

The letter that he is writing, as incredible as it might be, could not replace actually being present with the Roman believers. Otherwise, he would have been content to simply write the letter. Instead, Paul makes it is ongoing prayer that God would make a way for him to “be” with them.

Paul’s longing is to actually see the Roman Christians. He wants to be in their presence. He writes the book of Romans as means of enabling his time with the Romans to be even more fruitful, but not as a substitute for actually being together with them.

In a day of social distancing, we need to be reminded of the importance of being present with other believers. Those of you who are watching this service in your homes, we are thankful for this technology. But make no mistake, it is not a substitute for being present for worship. It is my continual prayer that God will enable us all to gather again together.

It is not just gathering that is important. It is gathering with the specific purpose of strengthening each other in the faith.

Paul’s purpose for wanting to see the Christians in Rome is clear: he wants to impart some spiritual gift so that they would be strengthened.

What does Paul have in mind?

Some would envision that Paul intends to lay his hands on the Roman believers and distribute to them various miraculous gifts of the Spirit, such as the gift of healing, the gift of miracles, the gift of tongues, etc.

But I am convinced that this is NOT what Paul had in mind.

I believe Paul has in mind those general means of encouragement that are available to us today. Why do I think this?

The imparting of some spiritual gift does not go one direction. Although Paul may hope to impart a spiritual gift to them so that they will be strengthened, he also expects that they will be able to give to him that he might also be encouraged. Mutual Encouragement.

This is the sort of thing that occurs when believers gather together around the Word of God. Paul might teach some aspect of the Gospel in greater clarity so as to strengthen them in the faith. The people of God would then chew on that truth. They would then discuss it and interact with Paul and one another. Iron would sharpen iron.

Even if Paul does most of the actual teaching and preaching, as he witnessed his hearers embracing the truth, he would have been greatly encouraged.

Paul speaks in general terms because he does not yet know them to know what their specific needs might be. When he actually gets to Rome and hears their questions, he will be able to apply truth directly to them. But for now, he speaks in general terms. I want to share some spiritual gift to you.

How about you?

Do you pray before coming to church that the message would strengthen you in your faith?

Do you ask God to bless your interactions before and after the service such that you would be encouraged and that you would be an encouragement to your fellow believers?
Does your presence in worship encourage you to at other times gather with other believers for prayer and mutual encouragement?

Are you rubbing shoulders with them often enough that you know them and their struggles? And such that they also know your struggles?

Because if you are not, then you are missing out.

The church is more than hearing the sermon, as central as it is to hear sound preaching. You are members of the body of Christ. You need to rub shoulders with one another?

We can see in this passage that true spiritual encouragement because Christians are purposeful and persistent.

Paul intended to be with the Romans long before it actually happened. But, if he had not purposed to go to them, it would never have happened. You should make it your purpose to build connections with other members of the congregation for the purpose of spiritual encouragement.

But we all have gathered with Christians and come away disappointed. We also need to be persistent.

There have been many times when people have told me that they have tried to build relationships in Church and it has just not happened. They just cannot connect with the people in church. They feel like they are different and don't really mesh. I would not discount the difficulties. But what I would say is that very seldom do spiritually encouraging relationships come easy. Persistence over time is usually necessary.

The power of God works as Christians gather together for worship and mutual encouragement.

3. The Power of God works in all sorts of people.

Expect to be blessed by people who are very different from you.

13 I want you to know, brothers,¹
that I have often intended to come to you
(but thus far have been prevented),
in order that I may reap some harvest among you
as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

14 I am under obligation
both to Greeks
and to barbarians,¹
both to the wise
and to the foolish.

The Greeks were those who were of the higher class, having been well-educated.
The Barbarians were those who did not speak Greek and so were often thought of as being "less-educated" and of the lower class.

In our day we might see the distinction between the college educated white collar individual, and the blue collar with only a High School diploma if that. Another way to see the distinction might be those who have lived here for some time and speak fluent English, and those who struggle with the English language.

Paul wants to make perfectly clear that the power of God transcends all of these class distinctions. They may exist, but not such that the Power of God is hindered by them.

As Reformed Christians, we place a high value upon education. I think this is a good thing. But we must never think that the power of God to save is dependent on having a high education. In some ways, it may even make it more difficult.

The higher your education, the more lies you will also be exposed to. And you must learn to be constantly diligent to not be persuaded by them. Most Universities in our country purposely indoctrinate their students away from a conservative biblical worldview.

The truth is that the Church needs both Greeks and Barbarians in its fold. The power of God is for both.

Colossians 3:11 ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave,¹ free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Here in Faith church you belong because you believe in Jesus and are being saved by the Power of God working in your life.

4. The power of God supremely works through the preaching of the gospel.

¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel
to you also who are in Rome.

The power of God is joined to the gospel.
And the gospel is joined to preaching.

Preaching has no power in itself. It is the means through which God chooses to powerfully work.

The electrical wires in your home do not themselves have power. But they are extremely effective in carrying electricity to the various appliances in your home.

Every Christian should diligently pray that the power of God would be manifest in their hearts through preaching.

If you want the power of God to work in your life, you will do well to diligently attend to the local preaching of God's Word. And, although God is certainly able to work in human hearts through the livestream and other electronic means, there is something special about being physically present.

The Church building is not a temple in which God dwells. But God does promise his presence in a special sense when his children gather together. At 11 am on Sunday mornings, 605 Bost Rd. becomes a holy place. And God himself speaks to his people through the preaching of the Word.

Your fundamental need as a Christian is the regular preaching of the Gospel. There are legitimate reasons when a saint is providentially hindered from attending to the preached word. But if a Christian understands how the power of God works through preaching, he will walk over hot coals to be present to hear his Lord speak.

John Calvin makes this absolutely clear as he comments on these verses. "... observe how much Paul ascribes to the ministry of the word, when he testifies that God thereby puts forth his power to save; for he speaks not here of any secret revelation, but of vocal preaching. It hence follows, that those as it were willfully despise the power of God, and drive away from them his delivering hand, who withdraw themselves from the hearing of the word." Calvin

I will never forget the effort that Pastor Sandy and Lynn would put forth to sit under the preached Word, and the disappointment he felt every time he could not attend worship.

5. The Power of God is for salvation.

¹⁶ For

I am not ashamed of the gospel,
for it is the power of God **for salvation**

God exerts his omnipotent power so that you can survive the coming Final Judgment and enter into his eternal glory.

Paul does not say that the power of God is exerted...

to give you a life of ease.
to save you from all suffering in this life.
to make sure that your choice of government leaders get into office.

No, in fact, the power of God will often work when life around us most trying.
I have serious concerns about the future of this country.
Many of the freedoms that we have become accustomed to will very likely be stripped away.
But I can honestly thank my God for it all.
That may seem like a strange statement to make.

I believe that God is using even these trying times to bring the lost to salvation.

God's power is not dependent upon the powers of this world.
I am seeing in my parents and extended family a far greater interest in knowing God.
My mom is more committed to the worship of God than ever.
Robin gave my cousin a great devotional for Christmas. She is avidly reading it.
My lifelong friend, Barney, of whom I have never really been sure where he stands spiritually, told me the other day that the events of the past year have made him more patriotic than ever and has driven him more to Christ.

These are people that I have been praying for most of my life. When I get discouraged as to the direction of my country, I remind myself that the Power of God is not diminished. It is working, just not to make this world my home.

The power of God is for salvation.

The gospel is not primarily a message for this life. Of course eternal life begins now as we are born again and freed from sin. But primarily, the gospel is the working of God's power to carry his people through the Final Judgment to eternal life.

The power of God is for salvation. No other power in the world can thwart God's ability to save you in Jesus Christ. God's power is reliable.

6. The power of God reveals the righteousness of God.

17 to everyone who believes,
 to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
For in it the righteousness of God is revealed
 from faith for faith,¹
 as it is written,
 "The righteous shall live by faith."²

How beautiful it is to hear the promise of the gospel! Believe Jesus Christ and you will be saved: everyone who believes without exception.

Look to Jesus Christ, and keep looking to him, and He will safely get you all the way to his eternal kingdom.

No exceptions.

Refuse to believe, and you have no such hope.

Keep believing and you have the personal guarantee of our righteous and holy God, that you will indeed be saved.

How does the Gospel reveal "the righteousness of God".

One, God never compromises his righteousness in order to save anyone. In fact, in the way that he saves, his righteousness is most perfectly displayed. When God cleanses you from your evil heart and sinful actions, he does not compromise his righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When God saves people, he does it righteously.

Secondly, as God saves people through the gospel He is faithfully doing what he said he would do.

And when someone is faithful to their word, they are acting righteously.

God never says one thing and does another. He always keeps his word. That is one way to define someone to be righteous.

Your faith is dependent upon God's faithfulness.

You are trusting in God's power and faithfulness to save you.

In the preaching of the Gospel, the power of God to save is proclaimed in Jesus Christ. And you are called to believe, to put your whole trust in his faithfulness.

7. The power of God is always received by faith.

from faith for faith,

as it is written,

"The righteous shall live by faith."

What does Paul mean by "from faith for faith"? (Or from faith to faith)

Theologians have struggled to agree on its meaning.

Calvin took it to mean from one degree of faith to another. His view has great merit. One only has to study the life of Abraham to see how his faith grew and matured throughout his life.

Hodge saw it as an idiomatic expression meaning "from beginning to end". Essentially, by faith alone.

Similar to, he worked in the fields "from morning to evening." "he worked all day" You are saved in the gospel by the power of God – from faith to faith. meaning beginning to end.

Paul tries to explain what he means by quoting an OT passage.
"The righteous shall live by faith."

Paul is quoting Habakkuk 2:4.

In the context in Habakkuk, God's true people (the righteous ones) are told to keep believing in the promises of God for blessing, even though they are not currently experiencing those blessings.

They are called to live lives of faith. They are to keep trusting even though their eyes cannot see the promises yet being fulfilled.

Faith is the means by which they daily live.

The difficulty with this is that it seems to make our salvation dependent more upon our faithfulness than it does upon God's power to save.

And it does not answer the question how those who are living by faith are actually made righteous. They are just called "the righteous."

A large part of the book of Romans will be making the case that no man is made righteous by his own works. Paul is clear: It is the Righteousness that comes from God, not our own, that saves.

So, how do we put together the intentions of Habakkuk with Paul use of them in Romans?

We would say something like this: Those who are righteous by faith, also live each day by faith.

And this is exactly what see played out in the book of Romans.

Chapters 1-5 make the case that we are Justified by faith alone in Christ alone.
Chapters 6-8 make the case that we are sanctified throughout this life by faith alone.

Faith always looks away from self. Faith does not rely on the power of self in any way. It is easy to slip into placing our faith in our faith. This is a dangerous trap.

Saving faith always looks away from self to the power of God.

“nothing is better than to rely on God’s word... our salvation is rendered safe and certain through God’s promise alone, and that therefore we ought not to seek any other haven” Calvin

“faith is a “kind of vessel” with which we “come empty and with the mouth of our soul open to seek God’s grace.” Calvin

Are you entrusting yourself to the power of God to save you?

Does your faith in his omnipotent power to save you through the final judgment strengthen you in your daily fears?

Can you say with Paul, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation.”?

Amen.

Benediction:

Brothers and sisters, all who are believing in Jesus Christ, receive strength from him to keep you firm in your faith, to save you out of your sins, and to safely carry you through the Judgment and into his eternal kingdom, your true home – the place of God’s eternal blessing.