

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. -Romans 1:16*

What's the Gospel? "The" Gospel, when we normally speak of it, we think of the core of the Gospel, which is the life of Jesus, wherein he performed perfect righteousness, which is then imputed to us and put on our record so that we can then be free from the wrath of God and receive the love and spirit of God. It's the imputation of righteousness, which later we're going to call the revelation of righteousness or the revealing of righteousness.

It's revealed to us like a shining light. When that righteousness shines on us, the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, we enter into life. That righteousness comes by grace through faith for everyone who believes the Gospel. We know that the Gospel is the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension and final consummation of all things by Jesus Christ. That's the core of it.

That's the hub, but it goes way out from there. The Gospel includes the creation, the full consummation, the glorification of our bodies, adoption into the family of God ... It includes all the good news of who God is and all that he has done and will do for us for all eternity. At the core of that is the cross and the life and the death, the burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

That's the gospel. If someone ever asks you, the quick Sunday school answer is: life, death, resurrection, ascension of Christ. Paul teaches us that in the book of Corinthians, and he says he's not embarrassed of it here in Romans. Why is he not embarrassed of the message of Jesus Christ's victory over sin, death, Satan, atonement for our sins, ascension to the right hand of the Father, resurrection from the dead?

The Athenians laughed at him when he spoke about it. "What's this babbler going on about?" He said, "I'm not embarrassed about that." Why? What does it say right there in verse 16? "For the Gospel is the power," the *dunamis*. Honestly, if you can get that, you're good. And if you don't have access to that, then you're damned. That's it. The power of God. And it's the power of God for salvation.

So let me ask you, what is *not* the power of God for salvation?

Your testimony. We love it. It's nice. We want to hear you tell it. But it has no intrinsic power. It's good; it's effective. By the spirit of God, he can use it. But it is not the means or the instrument through which God communicates his power to this world or to you. What else is not the power? What else has no intrinsic power?

Our works. Religious ritual. Our feelings. What about education? Does it have any intrinsic power? Of course not. Does this mean we should all be ignoramuses? No. But unless that

education is infused with the Gospel, it has no power. No power to save, at least. Now, when I say "It is the power of God for salvation," all of us thought of individual, spiritual salvation, for the most part. You didn't immediately think of salvation for humanity or for the rainforests or for the planet.

What about for our bodies? Is salvation a body issue? Well, if you're saved, then what happens with your body? Goes into the ground like a seed. One day you are resurrected in perfection with a glorified body. What about the emotions? To be saved is to be saved. For your emotions to be saved. What about your mind? Does salvation apply to the mind?

If you are saved, you are indeed filled with the Spirit. But what does being filled with the Spirit affect? I would say that it affects everything. Now, not everything immediately with all full and total power, but it begins the powerful transformation of all things, from your heart to your body to your family to your marriage to your relationships to your church, and if God would release that power, to a nation. Wherever the Gospel should be victorious.

Ultimately, salvation trickles down to the final full consummation of a new heavens and a new earth with God for all eternity. Now, what is performing all of that? What is accomplishing that total deliverance OF ALL THINGS? Who's performing it? God is, and he's doing it by his power, which is intrinsic to him alone as the Creator, and he is revealing that power, or transmitting that power, through the instrument of the Gospel. The Gospel is the sword through which he conquers his enemies or delivers you from your hurts. If that power, which is given to us from God through the instrument of the Gospel, isn't in your medical establishment or in your work or in your CPA activities, if it's not in your life, then it has no power in it, no transforming power, no Gospel power, no God power.

If someone feels like their biggest problem is that they were abused as a child, what would the "experts" and the therapists say? They would say, "Maybe we need to do some recall therapy." I know one particular person who was instructed to meditate on an object in the room for an extended period of time and just vent about all the things that they felt about this object.

Now, some therapeutic techniques can be good, but do they have the intrinsic power to save? If it is not rooted in the Gospel, if it's not founded on the Gospel, if it is Gospel-less or anti-Gospel then it has no intrinsic power to save in any sense, whether emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Period.

The only way this world even moves forward is through the Creator's power. The only way any transformation takes place is the Creator's power. There's no "other" power. There's the Creator's power. It's not like there's the Creator's power and then the Devil has some juice and we've got some. There's no yin-yang. It's God's power, period. The question is whether

or not you have his power in your life operating in such a way that you are saved, being saved, and will be ultimately saved in the end. That's why Paul's not embarrassed about it.

But what if we were to say that without the Gospel of Jesus Christ being effective in an overwhelming majority of citizens in the United States through the preaching of the Gospel, there will be no power of God and there will be no salvation? What if we were to say this standing before Congress or standing in a think tank where we're discussing various policy decisions that need to be made? What would people say about us?

They would laugh. They would mock. We'd be marginalized. They wouldn't invite us back. They would think, "So stupid. Jesus, cross, resurrection... What does that have to do with anything? That's for the Church world. That's for your spiritual private life. That's for those special times when you're on lock down. Not out here. Keep that over there."

Go to a typical public school board meeting and imagine saying something like that. "We're trying to help these kids. We want them to be transformed. We want to see our town changed, but we don't have Jesus. We don't have the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How can we? We don't have access to any power." Imagine saying that. They would laugh you out of that place. They'd be like, "No, no, no. We don't turn to the gospel for power. We have technology. We have science. We have expert opinions. We have models. We have algorithms."

You see the problem there. Let's consider our nation, for example. You have this coronavirus pandemic, everyone's freaking out and saying, "We're going to come together. Hope is here! We're going to vaccinate America! And we're going to do all these things with science and technology and money. We can make bread out of rocks. We can print money. We can! Yes we can.", What's the problem with all of it? No power. No saving power.

However, if they haven't been given the revelation, there's no way for them to understand that there is power in the Gospel. How can they believe unless they hear? And how can they hear unless there is a preacher? And how can there be a preacher unless God sends? Pray that God would send. You can see why the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for its saving power over all of life is essential to the transformation of a nation, and you can see, perhaps, why our nation is in deep waters, because the pulpits no longer preach what I'm saying right here.

This is what they preach, the ones that are Christian. There's plenty of pulpits that are not Christian at all. They're going to hell. But most who are Christians teach, "What he means right here is salvation, and that means forgiveness of your sins and then you get to go to heaven." And maybe a few therapeutic things, depending on the denomination we're talking about. There might be some healing of your brokenness. It's all true, but we pick and choose.

But the most you're going to get from most places is "Salvation affects the insides, and maybe the family, maybe the church." Their message paints a Gospel that doesn't apply to all of life.

This concept, that salvation only goes as far as the heart, the family, and maybe the church, is apparent in someone's refusal to tell you what "Jesus is King means." If you said that in conversation, literally no Christian on the planet would disagree with you. But when you say, Okay, what does that mean? Flesh it out. Does he rule? Does he reign? Yes? Well, how does that affect me? That person will reply, "Well, I don't want to be political." But how does that affect my family? How do I live out the truth of the Gospel that Jesus is King in my life today? And they say, "Well, I don't want to get into an argument." It's really because they're embarrassed, or at the very least, they truly believe that it doesn't affect anything outside of church. That is part of it.

The pagan idea of salvation is not like the Christian idea of salvation. For the pagan, salvation is escape. If you know anything about Buddhism, desires are to be completely squelched, the goal is to reach a blank mind with zero desires, zero will, and to die and to be absolved into oneness or into nirvana. It is escapist at the heart of it.

In ancient Greek dramas, people would be in a whole lot of mess. They needed to all be saved. And what they had was called the God of the machine, *deus ex machina*. So as the play was going on, you're thinking, "How in the world are these people going to be saved?" And out of nowhere, a machine of some sort would lower a god or a goddess or create some sort of cataclysmic event where the play would end and everyone would be saved. The pagan idea of salvation is like that. We're just trucking along. History is just cyclical. It's up, it's down. What happened in the past is going to keep happening. There's no forward progress. And how do we escape this? How do we stop it?

Much of Christianity is affected by that pagan idea of salvation, that what we need is not to experience victory over our obstacles, but to experience an escape from our obstacles. Whiskey religion is essentially escape from the problems. Much of the opioid crisis and the fact that people are doped out of their minds on all sorts of meds is because they don't have any power to overcome their obstacles, the brokenness, the sin, the fights, the broken relationships, the bad marriage. They have no power to have victory over obstacles, which is salvation. Instead, they just choose escape. The engine light comes on and they have no power to repair the engine, so they put little black tape over the engine light. Remember the Heaven's gate cult? They videotaped their mass suicide. The whole apocalyptic vision of these people was that they were waiting on the mothership. That concept is in us. It's as deep as being a Southerner is deep in us. That idea and that longing and that looking for escape.

Another pagan concept of salvation is security. The word *soteria*, which was translated "salvation" in Paul's day, wasn't a religious term, from what I can tell. It was a commonly used term, and it was used in many different ways, but one of the ways in which it was used is for what a slave on an imperial estate experienced. They had feudalism, which is when a lord owns all the land and protects all the people on it. And then you have the serfs who don't own things. They're not landowners. They're just the worker bees.

Everyone always says that the Middle Ages was so backwards because they had feudalism. Feudalism actually began in the Roman times and was going out of fashion in the Middle Ages, moving towards having a middle class, kind of like what we have today, where everybody gets to be an owner. In the Roman era, there were imperial estates where the emperor owned everything and everyone lived on the estate, and you got all your meals, you got all of your health care, you got all of your education, you got your job, you had no responsibilities. Well, you had responsibilities, but they were assigned to you. You didn't have to think. You didn't have to make decisions. You didn't need the burdens of freedom.

You had all the leeks and onions you wanted. You had everything taken care of for you. You were secure. And that word secure was *soteria*. You were safe. You were saved. Saved from what? Health care and welfare and income and food. You didn't have to worry about Barbarian hordes coming over. You had protection. But what were they safe from? Safe from all that potentially could ale them in this world. The pagan idea of salvation is escape from it or be totally secure in it. Just be safe in a little bubble. "Just tell me what to do. Keep me safe. Give me my allowance."

But the Christian understanding of salvation is victory, overcoming all that ails us, not in our power, but in the power of God that is given to us by grace, through faith, and transmitted through the instrument of the Gospel as we believe it and received it into our life. We have power, resurrection power, Gospel power... these are all different words for the same thing, released in our life so that we can actually leave the plantation. We don't have to escape but we can engage. We have the power that no one else has to overcome everything that's wrong with us on the inside and on the outside. But it comes through this. I really do believe that Paul gets this, and that's why he says he's not embarrassed.

The world is ignorant. They're lost without it.

By overcoming everything on the inside and outside, I mean spiritually and physically. And I mean socially. And I mean in time, historically, as well. In verse 17, he says the righteous shall live. That concept of living or *zoe*, life. Abundant life. Victorious life. The victorious life is not just victory over depression and sins. The non-denom guys are all about victory over anxiety, depression, all your felt needs. The reformed guys, we're hardcore about victory from the wrath of God. That's a big one. But it's all of that. It's victory over a crappy

marriage. It's relational. It's social. It's victory for your family, your church, your town. It's victory over poverty. If a whole town would trust in the Lord, live by his word ... Victory, but not with perfection. There's always obstacles. It's victory over the obstacles. They wouldn't have to escape and they wouldn't have to depend on some messianic state to solve all their problems and take away their freedom in the process.

They could live in the power of the Lord free and they could enjoy *life*. That's the idea of life; it is abundant life. It's organic life, like when you are united to Christ on the vine, like a tree planted beside still waters. Every religion has its concept of life, but the Christian concept of life is full and total.

Who gets this power? It's not discriminatory. There's only one condition. They have to believe. Which is amazing, and this is why it's good news. You don't have to earn this. You just have to believe. What do you have to believe? You have to believe the Gospel, but we can say that other ways. You have to believe *in* God. You have to believe *God*. You have to believe God's character, his person, his promises. You have to believe what he says. You have to believe everything that he accomplished for you. You have to believe he's given you his spirit. You have to *believe*. You have to trust. You have to follow.

And everyone who does that, no matter if they're Jew or Gentile, has access to salvation power. Being legally forgiven so that God justifies you happens the moment you believe. There's so much more, though. Sanctification, glorification, so much more. Jew first, also the Greek. And it was to the Jew first. The Gospel did go to all the towns of Judea. That was prophesied and Jesus fulfilled that. And also to all the Gentiles. And here is where it gets tricky. In that Gospel message, which is a big concept, "the righteousness of God is revealed."

That is a concept that we are going to have to learn as we go through this book. It would make more sense to me if it would have said, "In it, the *love* of God is revealed." To say, "The righteousness of God is revealed," what in the world does that mean? I actually don't think love and righteousness are that far apart. I think that biblically they're very close. What is righteousness but obeying the law? What is love? The fulfillment of the law. So I don't think it's totally different, I think it's all wrapped up together.

I also think Paul is communicating monumental truths in a very succinct, shorthand way to us. But if I had to, after all my studies, tell you what I believe most certainly, I would say this means that in the Gospel, when Jesus came to this earth, he performed perfect faithfulness. He fulfilled the law. What does that mean? It means he obeyed God the Father in everything that he did. He said, "I've come to do the will of the Father."

You know what it also meant? It also meant that he went to a wedding and drank wine and had a good time. Think about that. He's fulfilling the law and he's at a party. He's not a

drunkard. He enjoys the good gifts of God in moderation because he has self-control, a fruit of the spirit. He's living the life.

In all the stories he's with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, he loves them. His heart weeps when Lazarus dies. And he has all the disciples around him. I think that new movie, *The Chosen*, does a great job to show that they had a cool community. That was a group you wanted to be a part of. They had a power that united them. They were living the abundant life. They were living their best life, but not the way *that* guy means it. Way more than he could ever imagine, really.

Jesus is experiencing that power, he's experiencing that life, he's living that life. He's fulfilling all the law for several years, and I believe what Paul means is that there is a righteousness of God, not of works, by which he means fulfilling religious works. There's a righteousness of God, a perfection, a perfect resume. And it is given to us as a free gift by grace through faith for all who believe in Jesus. It's put on your record so that you are now legally free to receive power. That's what I think he means.

In the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. The word "revealed" doesn't work for us, but it means it's "revealed" to us. It's manifest. It's displayed. If someone reveals themselves they are exposing themselves. They're displaying something. The righteousness of God, which is Jesus's perfect record, is being given to mankind from heaven. Later it's going to say the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. We know what that means. God's pouring out his wrath on people from heaven to earth.

This is the righteousness of God revealed from heaven. He's pouring out his righteousness on this earth. The righteousness which Jesus performed, when it's given to you and you have a perfect record, that means now you're good with God and you have access to saving power. As you walk in faith, you have access to saving power because you have the righteousness of God imputed to you.

From faith for faith probably just means for everyone who believes as they live their life believing, Jew and Gentile. I think he's restating the same thing he said a second ago, "who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek." I think he's saying the same thing. The word "believe" and "faith" are translated from the same Greek word. "As it is written," and then he quotes from Habakkuk. "The righteous." What does that mean? Who's that? Christians, but more specifically, all those imputed with the righteousness of God, I would imagine.

"Shall live by faith." Live. Salvation power, life. By faith. I think it's similar to what Jesus says Jesus when he is in the wilderness and he tells the Devil, "Man doesn't live by bread alone but he lives by the Word." To live by faith is the same thing as to live by the Word, and as you live by faith in God and in his word, you are a conduit and you are receiving salvation power.

That's good news. That means everything can change. That means your marriage can change. Your emotional unbalanced state can change. It means that you might not be healed perfectly physically in this life, but one day you will be.

And you could even experience some healing today. Our chiropractor, Shawn, helps people experience healing. Where do you think that's coming from? There's no power other than the Creator's power. Everything else is conduit. Before the creation of the world, there was just God. That means all the energy, all the power to create derives from him. Anything we do to help anyone at any point in time is a derived power that comes from God.

It's flowing from his hand to the dry needles. Nothing has intrinsic power. The power is released in this world by grace through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course there is common grace, but that's not salvation power. That's not "victory over all your obstacles" power.

When Paul says he's not ashamed of the Gospel, I think that's a message that we can take for ourselves. We can't be afraid to get into it with someone if it means sharing the gospel. I think every conversation is a spiritual conversation to some degree because it reflects our worldview, our situation. It can lead to a conversation about salvation through Jesus Christ. However that is, baseball to politics.

How far reaching is salvation? Our mission statement says it's all of life. You learn to follow all of Christ in all of life by grace through faith, having received salvation power from God on account of the fact that he has imputed Christ's righteousness to you as a free gift and atoned for all of your sins, making way for all of that. There's a mouthful there. But I think Christ Church folks get all that. You know all that, right? What else? Do Nazis get salvation power?

If they repent. If they repent and trust in Jesus. What about a whole nation of Nazis? Do they get Gospel power? Has it ever happened before? Yes, in Nineveh. Nineveh was way worse than the Nazis. People don't know about that. Nineveh made the Nazis look nice. The whole nation repented and God blessed them.

There's quite a few stories of individuals, of course, and large groups of people experiencing the power of God through the preaching of the Gospel. Enough people and you call it revival. You get all the spheres involved, family, church, and state, that's when you call it reformation. That would be fantastic. But it's only going to be through Gospel power, preached by his Church, modeled by his Church, et cetera.

What else? Do you live by faith? Do you parent your children by faith? I don't mean are you positive. I don't mean simply having a positive attitude while you're dealing with your kids. When there is an obstacle, when there is a sin, when there is a problem, do you go about



solving that problem by faith? Some of you here are tempted to think, "Spanking doesn't work." Pastor Brandon's kids are quiet like his wife is. It's just their disposition.

That's true. But does spanking work? No, spanking doesn't work, because it has no inherent power. Spanking *by grace through faith* works. Every time. And it works in the precise way that God wants it to work in that moment. If you've been spanking for 10 years and it's not working, have you been spanking by grace through faith in God's promises of what he will do for you and your children? If you are discipling by faith, it means you are dealing with the problems by what the Bible says, because that's what God says and you have faith in him.

The "experts" would say how God ordinarily brings children to the faith is abuse. And if we talk about spanking by grace through faith in public, prepare to be embarrassed, prepare to be investigated. What they say needs to be done is this technique, this scientific experiment, and we have the certifications and the diplomas to back it up. It's two different gospels, both promising salvation power, both promising life. The question is whether or not we believe pseudoscientists and the experts or we believe what God says in his Bible.

All you have to do to find out is give birth to a bad little kid. And you will find out what you trust in. I mean one that's publically bad. One that is just type A extroverted, stubborn, I could name a few. Some of you probably were a few. All you have to do to know if you're living by faith is, what do you do when you get hungry? What do you do when someone attacks you? What do you do when you're in the wilderness? Do you live by the Word or do you live by that which the world promises conveys salvation power?

The power of salvation doesn't just mean "being saved." It means we walk around and we interact with things and our salvation changes that. Not the salvation within us. But it's the power of the Gospel, the fact that we are saved, that we have eyes to see each individual that we meet, that we're able to communicate through. It's so much broader than "life, death, and resurrection."

Taking the principles that God has given us through either a spanking or an encouraging word to a worker, in a marriage ... The breadth of the Gospel extends to all of life. It's amazing the wisdom that you can have in every situation if the Gospel is applied to all of that. That's what salvation is.

Maybe you have gone through a very difficult trial, and you knew the whole time in your heart and mind "God loves me, and he is in sovereign control." He is in control. "He works all things for good for those who love him and are called according to his purposes" (Romans 8:28). All that anyone means for evil he uses for good, even your worst, most up-close-and-personal enemy, he uses all that for your good.

You have all those things in you. Those are Gospel truths. Those are all truths about the good will of God toward you. That's gospel. It's not just life, death, and burial, that's what opens it up. That's the core of it. But God's good will for you, he's on your side. If you have that in your heart and mind, you go through the trial as if you're walking on water. That's the point of it. You have abundant life in the midst of the trial. You can consider it all joy. You have a power, resurrection power, salvation power, Gospel power, in your life, which enables you to transcend, to be different from the world. Here's the thing. When you are in the trial is when he's teaching you that.

As parents, you can apply this to how you are with your kids and the conversations you have with them. Maybe you have a child who struggles with understanding and believing the Bible. You have to trust in the power of God unto salvation. Tell yourself, "God, you save. Not me. And I will be faithful to teach him all that I can and all that I know."

And God has promises for the children of believers, and God promises that his Word does not return void. He promises that he can unleash salvation power in your life so that you can experience a victory over obstacles in due time. The devil promises instant gratification. The devil promises you perfect children today. Just trust this expert, pay them \$200 an hour, sit in a circle, and have share time with them. There's no saving power in any of those fancy techniques.

The devil prints money; God promises long term wealth as you honor him with your wealth. Sometimes we have to be poor, and it's in that season that you finally come to realize, "I'm glad Jesus passed this test, because I'm about to not make it." I've actually trusted in many things that were not Jesus along the way. Jesus said this to the children of Israel, "I fed you with manna for all those years, and I made it so your clothes never wore out so that you would learn to live not by bread but by every word which comes from the mouth of God."

You have to have the trial. That's the training process, and it's in the midst of the trial that you learn to live by faith. You can live by faith because the righteousness of God has been revealed in the Gospel, which is the power of God for salvation. That is the heart of what Paul is saying in these two verses and the theme of the whole book. He's about to make his case for all of this. There's some heavy stuff right there in those two passages.