

God's Power

A Study on Romans 1:8-17

by Dr. Jack L. Arnold

In the first seven verses of the first chapter of Romans, Paul gave a formal introduction of himself and his message. He declared: 1) his apostleship; 2) the gospel, his message; 3) the deity and humanity of Christ; 4) the resurrection of Christ from the dead; and 5) the grace of God shed upon the Roman Christians in providing for their salvation. This formal introduction gives us an insight into Paul's doctrinal convictions.

In verses 8-17, Paul gave a more personal introduction. While he had never been to Rome, Paul showed his intense interest in the Romans and his desire to be with them. This personal introduction showed something of the heart of the Apostle Paul. He was not only a man who had many doctrinal convictions, but he also had a heart for Christ, for the gospel, and for people. He had both a head knowledge and a heartbeat for Christ.

PAUL'S LOVE FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS (Romans 1:8-13)

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all." Paul was a man of prayer. He prayed for other Christians even though he didn't know many of them personally. He ever thanked God for any grace he found in any saint.

In this verse he stopped to thank the Lord for the outward evidences of the reality of Christ in the Roman Christians. The thing that spurred Paul to prayer was the great work of God in the Romans.

Many personal prayers and public prayer meetings would be more vital if we were prompted to pray by deep spiritual reasons. Many prayer meetings are nothing more than a roll call at an infirmary.

The order of prayer is to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit.

"That your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." The "faith" here is faith in Christ or doctrine that is applied to life. The words "your faith" do not emphasize the attribute of faith, but what was believed. These people were sound in doctrine and life and this was heralded throughout the entire Roman world.

The church at Rome became famous for its faith. Churches today are famous for all kinds of things: architecture; stained glass windows; organs; choirs; the cantatas that are sung

at Christmas and Easter; a preacher who is suave and eloquent; the number of millionaires who attend; and so on. A church should become famous because of its doctrinal soundness and its willingness to stand for and propagate the truths of the Bible.

Notice that the Romans' faith became known through the spoken word, without television, radio, telegraph, newspapers, or other modern means of communication. When a group of Christians are obedient to the Lord and propagate their faith, it doesn't take long for a whole city or state or even nation to be talking about them.

"That without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." It is obvious that Paul believed in prayer for he was constantly praying for these Romans. Prayer is never easy; it is work. Prayer works, prayer is work, and prayer leads to work. If we sit around and wait for God to move us to pray, we will find ourselves praying very little.

"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 prayed that he could go to Rome and that he would have smooth sailing. Years passed before he finally went to Rome, and he went not by a prosperous journey, but by a perilous journey with many dangers and even shipwreck.

God gave Paul his desire but he did not have an easy journey. Often God grants our desire when we pray, but accomplishes it in a way quite different from what we had hoped. Paul's journey was in the will of God, but not according to his human plans.

"For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established." Paul may have meant a gift of the spirit, but probably thought more in terms of some other type of spiritual blessing. He may have wanted to share the gospel with them through his teaching ministry so that they might be better instructed in the truth.

We must always preach the word — the whole counsel of God. Someone has said, "Sermonettes by preacherettes make Christianettes." Nothing but the Word of God will establish a Christian. You cannot find even one Christian on this earth who has developed in strength of wisdom and witness in the Lord who has attained it by any other means than the study of and meditation on the Word of God:

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17)

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. (1 Pet. 2:2).

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

“That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” Paul recognized the importance not only of the ministry of church leaders to the laity, but also of the ministry of the church to its leaders. While Paul spoke specifically of comfort, he may also have had in mind exhortation and teaching. Certainly Paul was able to benefit the Roman Christians in these ways, but the Spirit had been teaching the Romans too, and they probably had things to teach Paul. God help the pastor who cannot learn from his flock!

Paul rarely emphasized a sharp distinction between laity and clergy. He knew the Romans had a ministry to him, and that church leaders in general were men who needed the laity just as the laity needed the clergy. A man called to be a pastor, teacher, or an evangelist has an appointed office from God, but he is a human being like everyone else. He is one of the fellowship and should be accepted in the light of these things.

“That oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto).” Paul had planned many times to visit Rome but was hindered. He didn’t say whether it was God or Satan who hindered, but all was under the sovereignty of God. This shows that the human plans of the apostle were no more inspired than those of Christians today.

“That I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.” Paul desired to go to Rome that he might preach the gospel so that some would respond to Jesus Christ. He expected fruit when he told others about Christ.

PAUL’S LOVE FOR THE GOSPEL AND THOSE OF CHRIST (Romans 1:14-17)

“I am debtor” The New American Standard Bible says, “I am under obligation.” Paul felt himself obligated to the whole human race. He was a debtor to God for his salvation and he was a debtor to mankind because he had been entrusted with the gospel. The possession of the gospel makes one a debtor to all who have not heard.

Those who know the gospel have a sense of debt to all who do not know. There must also be a sense of duty and responsibility if the gospel is to get to others.

“Both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise and the unwise.” The Romans and the Greeks considered only those who spoke the Greek language and who had adopted the Greek culture to be civilized; all others were barbarians. The Christian is obligated to take the gospel to all types of people whether or not they are considered by others to be civilized. Christianity is cross-cultural.

The terms “wise and unwise” or “wise and foolish,” as in the NASB, refer to the educated and the uneducated, the intelligentsia and the common folk. The gospel is for both

the refined college professor and for the “down and outer” on skid row.

I am ready (eager) to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.” Because of his debt to humanity, Paul was ready and willing to preach the gospel. Someone has said, “No person has the right to hear the gospel twice until everyone in the world has heard it once.” Yet the average so-called Christian in America has heard the gospel many times and feels no real obligation or burden to tell others of this message. John Guest once said,

“The unbeliever does not believe the Bible and does nothing about it; he is operating on his convictions. But Christians claim to love Christ and the Bible and do not spread the good news of Christ to others. It is not the unbeliever who is dishonest and two-faced but it is the professing Christian.”

Paul had a desire to spread the good news of Christ and he made himself available to tell others. He was a yielded vessel for God’s purpose. He was conscious that his one purpose was to preach the gospel.

A generation ago there was a wealthy man in the Midwest who was an outstanding Christian layman. When asked what he did, he would reply, “I am a witness for Jesus Christ, but I pack pork to pay expenses.” Christians should always keep in mind the fact that they are Christ’s witnesses. There is nothing wrong with careers in fields other than ministry, but we must all remember that the work of the ministry should not be left to ministers alone. We are all witnesses for Jesus Christ, no matter what we do to pay expenses.

The last words of our Lord on this earth were, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8). I question seriously whether any person in this world who professes to be a Christian is in reality a Christian if he makes no move whatsoever to tell others about it! If we are not willing to be witnesses, we have no right to call ourselves Christians. Evangelism is the heart beat of Christianity.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” Paul never shirked an opportunity to tell others about Christ. He never held back the gospel; he gloried in it completely. He was never a coward or a traitor to the person of Jesus Christ.

People are ashamed to witness because of what others will think about them. They are afraid of world opinion and social pressures. But God has promised to bless us if we will be faithful witnesses.

“For it is the power of God unto salvation.” Paul was convinced that the gospel was God’s power to bring a person to faith in Christ:

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us

which are saved it is the power of God. . . But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:18,23,24).

Paul expected fruit because he knew that when he faithfully proclaimed the gospel some would respond to Jesus Christ. He knew the power to convert men was in the gospel and not in him.

What is the gospel? The gospel is good news; it is concerned with the fact that Christ died for the sins of men, was buried, and rose again on the third day to declare those men righteous:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

All who will believe this and trust their salvation only to Christ will be saved, for the gospel is God’s power unto salvation. The gospel story is all about man’s complete ruin in sin and God’s perfect remedy in Christ.

What is salvation? Salvation means “safety” and indicates that a man is set free from the guilt and penalty of sin, that he no longer stands under the wrath of God.

No one can become a Christian until he sees that he has a need for a Saviour. A person must see himself as a sinner, estranged from God, spiritually dead, without hope, without strength, and incapable of doing anything to gain merit before God. A person must realize that without Christ he is lost and headed for eternal judgment. Once a person realizes that he is a sinner, then and only then will he flee to the Saviour who alone can forgive sin. The simplest formula for Christianity is: I deserve hell; Jesus Christ took my hell; there is nothing for me but his heaven.”

“To everyone.” The gospel is for everyone; the offer is unlimited. It is for the whole human race. Anyone who desires to be a Christian may be one.

“That believeth.” While the gospel is offered to all, the reality of salvation belongs only to those who believe. Here “believe” means “trust or entrust oneself to Christ as one’s only hope of salvation.” It is committing or abandoning oneself to Christ alone as the way of salvation. This is not just mental assent, but commitment to Christ! One believes that

Christ died for his sins, bore his punishment, and rose again on the third day for his justification.

“To the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Here Paul expressed the historical presentation of the gospel as it went first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. This does not mean that the Jew is always to have the gospel presented to him before it goes to others; it is precedence, not preference!

“For therein is the (a) righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.” The gospel tells sinful men of a righteousness that God gives men when they believe on Christ and that makes them acceptable to him. God’s wrath must come down upon all men, for all are sinners, without any personal righteousness that will make them acceptable to God. But through the death of Christ, God can give a person righteousness which makes him right before God. This righteousness is neither felt nor experienced but becomes the possession of every person who places his faith in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour! This righteousness is “out of faith into faith,” that is, by faith from start to finish.

“The just shall live by faith.” Salvation is by faith and not by works. A person can be declared righteous before God only by faith — not by good works, not by baptism, not by church membership. Only Jesus Christ can offer the forgiveness of sins and credit to one’s account a righteousness that will give a perfect standing before almighty God. Those who have been declared righteous are to continue to walk by faith.

CONCLUSION

If you will trust Jesus Christ, abandoning yourself to him as your personal Saviour, you will receive the forgiveness of sin and be given a righteousness that will make you, a sinner, acceptable to God.