

April 23, 2015

The Power of Salvation

Romans 1:16b (NASB), **“for it is the power of God...”**

People have an inborn desire to improve their lives, they have a desire to be changed. This is why if you walk into any bookstore or get on Amazon, the largest section is the self-help section. People want to look better, feel better, have more money, more power, more influence. As the title of one popular “Christian” book says, “Look Good, Feel Great,” this is the common desire of many people.

The entire premise of advertising is to convince people to buy a product or service that will fill that void in their lives. Many people want to be changed inwardly, in a way that will make them feel less guilty and more content. In our culture there is then a host of programs, philosophies, and religions that promise to meet those desires. Many man-made schemes succeed in making people feel better about themselves, but the ideas promoted have absolutely no power to remove the sin that brings about those feelings of guilt and discontent. Nor can those ideas make men right with God. In fact, the more successful such approaches are the more likely they are to drive people away from God and insulate them from His salvation.

In Jeremiah 13:23 it says, **“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil.”** It is not within our power to change our fallen nature. In Matthew 22:29 Jesus rebuked the Sadducees who were trying to entrap Him, **“You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures or the power of God.”** Only the power of God is able to overcome man’s sinful nature and impart spiritual life.

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that man cannot be changed or saved by good works, by the church, by ritual, or by any other human means. Men cannot be saved even by keeping God’s own law, which was given to show men their helplessness to meet His standards in their own power. The law was not given to save men but rather to reveal to us our sin and therefore drive us to God’s saving grace.

Later on in this letter to the Roman church Paul declares our complete impotence and God’s infinite power. In Romans 5:6 he writes, **“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”** In Romans 8:3 he wrote, **“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did; sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.”** In 1 Peter 1:23 Peter affirms the same bedrock truth, **“You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.”**

In 1 Corinthians 1:18 Paul reminds the Corinthian church and us that **“the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”** Later on in that same chapter in verses 23-25 he writes, **“but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”** To most of the world the message of the gospel is completely absurd but it is in fact the power of God to transform the lives of men and women from lives utterly controlled by sin to lives that are then controlled by the power of God. John 1:12 says, **“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”**

The ancient pagans of Paul’s day openly mocked Christians not because the idea of substitutionary atonement seemed ridiculous but also because the gods they worshiped were in no way personal gods. They were apathetic, detached, very remote, and completely indifferent to the welfare of humankind. The concept of a God who was caring, redeemed His people, was self-sacrificing was beyond their ability to comprehend. When archaeologists were excavating a site in Rome they discovered a painting that depicted a slave bowing down to a cross with a donkey on it. The caption said, “Alexamenos worships his god.”

Paul did not want to build on human wisdom or appeal to human understanding so he told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, **“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified...”** Later in that same letter in chapter 4 verse 20 he wrote, **“For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.”**

All believers, no matter how gifted and mature they might be, have human limitations and weaknesses. Our minds, bodies, and perceptions are imperfect. Yet, incredibly, God uses us as His channels for His redeeming and sustaining power when we serve Him obediently.

Our challenge as followers of Christ then is to understand the awesome power of God which is behind the message of the gospel. This reality should embolden us to boldly go and share the **“living hope”** with a world that is increasingly without hope.