

“A Righteousness From God”

Sermons on Romans # 3

Texts: Romans 1:16-17; Habakkuk 2:1-5

Paul is eager to come to Rome and preach the gospel. Yes, he knows full-well that the gospel is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. He also knows that Christians are despised throughout the Roman empire because of the scandal of a crucified Savior. Despite the hostility to the message of the cross from Greco-Roman culture, and despite the very real temptation to be ashamed of Jesus Christ—Paul is not ashamed of the gospel. Paul knows that the gospel he has been called to preach is power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, Jew or Gentile. When the gospel is preached, a righteousness from God is revealed.

In verses 1-7 of the opening chapter of Romans, we find Paul’s salutation as well as a series of personal remarks made to the church in Rome in verses 8-15. Paul has not met any of the Christians to whom he is writing, but he has heard about their great faith which was reported widely throughout the churches. With this reputation for faithfulness to Christ coming from a church in the very heart of the pagan Roman empire, it is no wonder that Paul desires to go to Rome for a visit, although, thus far, he has been prevented from doing so. The apostle is not only encouraged by what he has heard about the church in Rome, he also knows that by visiting the congregation he will be able to offer to them some encouragement as well.

Since Paul has been called by Jesus Christ to be the apostle to the Gentiles, it is his apostolic calling to shepherd the churches under his care. One reason he desires to travel to Rome is so that he may impart to them various spiritual gifts which will both strengthen the church as well as confirm the faith of those who may be struggling. But the main reason that Paul is eager to visit the church, is his desire to preach the gospel. Not only has this gospel been promised beforehand throughout the Old Testament, but this gospel pertains to Jesus Christ, who, as to his human nature, is an ancestor of David, and who, by virtue of his resurrection from the dead has been declared the Son of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so having surveyed Paul’s salutation and personal comments to the believers in Rome, we now turn to our text in Romans 1:16-17, where we have in summary form, the thesis statement of Paul’s letter.

Although these two verses really are a continuation of Paul’s opening remarks in verses 8-15, it is not inappropriate to mark off them as a kind of thesis statement which, in many ways, summarizes Paul’s theology as a whole.¹ In fact, these two verses not only set out the reason why Paul is eager to preach the gospel in Rome, but in them, Paul states in very precise terms the organizing theme which gives unity to the issues raised throughout the Book of Romans, which will be spelled out in great detail in subsequent

¹ Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 27. Cf Cranfield’s suggested outline, in which 16a is included in the previous section, “Paul and the Roman church” (Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.86-87). Paul is eager to preach the gospel in Rome, because he is not ashamed of that gospel. γὰρ indicates the reason as to why Paul is not ashamed to preach the gospel—the gospel is the power of God. See Schreiner, Romans, p. 58.

chapters.² While Paul addresses a number of subjects in Romans which plagued Jew and Gentile in the early church, particularly in the church in Rome, all of these questions ultimately find their answer in the way in which Jew and Gentile sinners are reconciled to a Holy God. Since these verses are such a tight summary of Paul's gospel, they take on an importance way out of proportion to their length.³

Since there is so much here in the span of just two short verses, let us go through them phrase by phrase and word for word in order to unpack the things Paul has to tell us.⁴

The first thing Paul tells us is that he is not ashamed of the gospel. In fact, he is eager to come to Rome for the very purpose of preaching the gospel! But if the gospel is such an offense to Jews, Greeks and Romans, you would think that Paul would be somewhat reticent to travel to the very heart of the Roman empire and preach a message that has on previous occasions provoked rioting, divided families and landed him in jail. Charles Cranfield reminds us that these words reflect Paul's rather "sober recognition of the fact that the gospel is something of which, by the very nature of the case, Christians will in this world constantly be tempted to be ashamed. . . . Paul knows full well the inevitability of the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel in view of the continuing hostility of the world to God, on the one hand, and on the other, the nature of the gospel itself, its unimpressiveness over against the impressiveness of the world."⁵ There will always be the temptation, whether from pure motive or not, to adapt or change the content of the gospel so as to remove the offense. To avoid the offense of the cross and make the product more attractive, we soften the edges and remove the scandal. We also have nothing left of the gospel. This was Paul's temptation, and it is ours.

Why, then, is Paul so eager to preach such an offensive and controversial message? The reason why Paul is not ashamed of the gospel is very simple. The gospel—defined as the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3-5)—*"is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."* Paul knows that the gospel is the divinely-appointed means by which God to calls His people to faith in Jesus Christ.⁶ Therefore, despite the fact that the

² Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.87.

³ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 66.

⁴ As Moo points out, these two verses contain four subordinate clauses, supporting or illuminating what has gone before. Says Moo: "Paul's pride in the gospel (v. 16a) is the reason why he is so eager to preach the gospel in Rome (v. 15). This pride, in turn, stems from the fact that the gospel contains or mediates, God's saving power for everyone who believes (v. 16b). Why the gospel brings salvation is explained in verse 17a: it manifests God's righteousness, a righteousness based on faith. Verse 17b, finally, provides scriptural confirmation for the connection between righteousness and faith." See: Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 64.

⁵ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.86.

⁶ Cf. *Canons of Dort* 1.3. "And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom He will and at what time He pleaseth; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?* (Rom. 10:14-15)."

gospel is a scandal and seems like only so much foolishness to pagans, the gospel is the demonstration of God's power to save sinners, because the gospel provides the only means by which sinful men and women can be delivered from the wrath of a Holy God.⁷

Thus Paul can speak of gospel as the power [δυναμις, *dunamis*] of God for salvation. The idea that God saves sinners who cannot save themselves is a prominent theme throughout Paul's writings. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul says much the same thing that he says here in Romans; "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*" Paul is crystal clear here—all saving power for salvation resides in God's power made manifest in the message of Christ crucified. Such power is not found in humanities' natural ability to believe the gospel. Dead people cannot resurrect themselves!

Paul makes this same point quite clearly elsewhere. In Ephesians 2:1, 4-5, Paul writes "*as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.*" Similarly in *Colossians 2:13*, Paul states "*when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature (flesh), God made you alive with Christ.*" Paul's point is that God acts upon the sinner, while the sinner is still "dead" in sin and unable to believe. Therefore, the message of the gospel is the means through which God creates faith. This is what Paul was getting at when he spoke of his own calling, along with that of all the believers in Rome. God called them through the gospel, and they obeyed that call when they believed. In fact, in Romans 10:17, Paul will go on to make this same point quite explicitly: "*faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*" The preaching of the gospel is the divinely-chosen means through which God creates faith. In Romans 1:16, Paul speaks of this terms of the manifestation of the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

Since "power" and "salvation" were both prominent themes in Hellenistic (Greek) religion it is important that Paul address these ideas because pagan religions were so concerned with them.⁸ God's power is displayed not through ecstatic religious experience, nor through states of altered consciousness, nor in secret wisdom. God's power is manifest in the message of the cross, because it is in this message, that God makes sinners alive and brings them to faith in Christ, so that they might be saved from his wrath.

"Getting saved," is prominent theme in contemporary American evangelicalism. But I suspect that much of what our contemporaries mean when they talk about "getting saved," has very little to do with Paul's doctrine of salvation. The term which is translated as "salvation" throughout the New Testament, [σωτηρία, *soterion*] is primarily eschatological in its meaning. Think of it this way: the gospel is the power of God to deliver us, or "to save" us from God's wrath which is coming upon the whole world. This can be seen in the fact that in Paul's letters the verb [*sozien*] "to save" and the noun, [*soteria*] "salvation" are used only in connection with humanities relationship with God, while another term, [*ruesthai*] is employed where deliverance from temporal dangers is concerned.⁹ In other words, if you were saved from a burning building, the appropriate word is *ruesthai*, while *soterion* is used in reference to deliverance from God's wrath on the day of judgment.

⁷ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.86.

⁸ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.88.

⁹ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.88.

That salvation is, in part, deliverance from God's wrath is clear throughout Paul's letters. In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul is speaking of church discipline and excommunication, when he tells the Corinthian church to hand the man sleeping with his father's wife "over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." Later on in the Book of Romans, (5:9) Paul writes "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" And then in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 we read, "since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet." In all of these verses, to be saved, is to be delivered from God's wrath which is coming upon the world when our Lord returns at the end of the age. This is the day of judgment, the day of resurrection, and the day in which God recreates the heavens and the earth. For God's people it is the day of salvation!

But not only does *soterion* (salvation) include deliverance from final judgment, it also includes the restoration of that glory which we lost in the fall. In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul writes, "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." Thus salvation also entails our restoration into the image (*ikon*) of Christ, who saves us by his power. This means that salvation is connected to our glorification (cf. Romans 8:28-30).

Although salvation is characteristically spoken of in a future sense, we also find salvation spoken of by Paul in both the past and present tenses as well. In Romans 8:4, Paul is speaking of our hope as Christians. There he writes: "For in this hope we were saved [past tense]. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?" Since Christ has already secured our salvation by virtue of his death and resurrection, Paul can speak of salvation as something which already has been accomplished for us. Because Christ has died for our sins and raised for our justification, we were saved by him on Calvary's cross and in the garden tomb. The same term also appears in the present tense. In 2 Corinthians 2:15, Paul says, "we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." Therefore, salvation can also be used "to describe the believer's present waiting and hoping and struggling which have salvation for their goal."¹⁰

For Paul, then, salvation has a three-fold focus. First, salvation can be spoken of in the past tense because God has already secured deliverance from his wrath for us through the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Second, salvation is the present possession of every Christian believer. We are in Christ through faith, even now, although we must long for that day when we reach our goal, which is the glorification and redemption of our bodies. Third, final salvation is future. Indeed, when Jesus returns Christ on the last day, we will not face him as our angry judge, but as our merciful Savior who will transform us from dust to glory. In that day of salvation, we will be completely redeemed, freed from the guilt and power of sin, and resurrected with all the glory possessed by the Savior himself. This, then, is what Paul means when he speaks of the gospel as the power of God unto salvation. And since God does this through the gospel, this explains why Paul is not ashamed of it! The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

That last phrase, "all who believe," is very important. The message of the cross is the power of God unto salvation. That message summons all who hear it to faith in Jesus Christ. Those who believe when the gospel is preached, manifest what Paul has called the "obedience of faith." And the gospel does indeed save those, but only those, who believe. Paul is not addressing the exceptional cases here—for example,

¹⁰ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.89.

what happens to children of believers who die before coming to faith, and so on. Paul's point here is that the gospel summons faith, and those who obey that call and believe are saved, while those who are summoned but do not believe, will indeed face the wrath of God in the judgment. This is why it is perfectly correct to say that those who reject the gospel, disobey God.

But there is something else to consider here as well. In his wonderful little commentary on Romans, Swedish Lutheran Anders Nygren, makes a very important point. "The gospel and faith belong together inseparably. Therefore we may not speak of faith as something which could exist apart from the gospel. Faith is not a state of the soul which man must have, that by its aid he may receive the gospel. It is the gospel which is primary, which creates faith and awakens it in us. When one hears the gospel and is conquered by it, that is faith. Faith is not prior to the gospel and independent of it. It [faith] arises only through one's meeting with the gospel."¹¹

If Nygren correct about this, and, no doubt, he is, saving faith can arise only in connection to the preaching of the gospel. This means that faith is not our contribution to our salvation, nor is faith the one work God requires of us in order to be saved. Rather, faith is what God creates in our hearts through the preaching of the cross which is the power of God. And yet even though faith is something which God creates through the hearing of the gospel (cf. Romans 10:17), at the very same time, faith is our own genuine and intensely personal response to God's promise of deliverance from his wrath, because of the genuine freedom which God restores to us through the power of the gospel.¹² Faith is not a human work. Faith doesn't do anything. Rather, faith receives what God freely offers to us in Christ.

Therefore, faith is a reception of the saving benefits of Jesus Christ. To have faith in Jesus Christ is to trust (believe) in Christ's power to save us from our sins. As B. B. Warfield once put it,

It is accordingly, solely from its object that faith derives its value. . . . The saving power of faith resides thus not in itself, but in the Almighty Savior on whom it rests....It is not strictly speaking,

¹¹ Nygren, Commentary on Romans, p. 78.

¹² Cf. Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.90. Cranfield's comments here are worth repeating: "It (faith) is not a qualification which some men already possess in themselves so that the gospel, when it comes to them, finds them eligible to receive its benefits. Faith, in the sense in which the term is used here, can exist only as a response to the gospel (or its OT foreshadowing). And it is also wrongly conceived, if it is thought of as being, as a man's response to the gospel, a contribution from his side which, by fulfilling a condition imposed by God, enables the gospel to be unto salvation for him. In that case, faith would itself be in the last resort a human meritorious work, a man's establishment of his own claim on God by virtue of something in himself. But it is of the very essence of faith, as Paul understands it, that it opposed to all human deserving, all human establishing of claims on God (cf., e.g., 3.20-22, 28; 4.2-5; 9:32; Gal 2.16; 3.2, 5). For Paul man's salvation is altogether -- not almost altogether -- God's work; and the faith spoken of here is the openness to the gospel which God Himself creates, the human response of surrender to the judgement and unmerited mercy of God which God Himself brings about -- God who not only directs the message to the hearer but also Himself lays open the hearer's heart to the message. And yet this faith, as God's work in a man, is in a real sense more truly and fully the man's own personal decision than anything which he himself does of himself; for it is the expression of the freedom restored to him -- the freedom to obey God. But it is not till chapter eight that this secret of faith is revealed."

even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. The saving power of faith resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith; and in this the whole biblical representation centers, so that we could not more radically misconceive it than by transferring to faith even the smallest fraction of that saving energy which is attributed in the Scriptures solely to Christ Himself.¹³

Since salvation is promised to all who believe—the “all” (πᾶντι) emphasizing the fact that there are no ethnic distinctions when it comes to God’s salvation—Paul goes on to immediately remind us of an important redemptive historical reality. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe, “*first for the Jew and then for the Gentile.*” Based upon the prior course of the history of salvation, it is undeniable that the Jew has had a very distinct priority in God’s plan. God did not choose the Incas, the Aztecs, the Mongols, or the Normans, Franks or Saxons to receive the Scriptures and secure the birth of the Messiah. God chose the Jews to be that people through whom salvation would come to the ends of the earth, including the Gentile nations. Indeed, this is such an important issue, Paul will devote three whole chapters of Romans (9-11) to the pressing question of how Jews and Gentiles fit together in God’s redemptive purposes. But here in Romans 1:16, Paul is probably referring to the fact that not only was the gospel first preached to Israel and only later to the Gentile nations, but that true Israel will continue to occupy a role in God’s redemptive purposes.¹⁴ Paul will spell this out later in Romans 11:26, when he speaks of “all Israel” being saved.

This brings to the first clause of Romans 1:17: “*for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed.*” The gospel, as we have seen, refers to the message of Christ crucified for sinners. Here Paul adds the important fact that it is through the preaching of that gospel that God’s righteousness is revealed. It should come as no surprise that the meaning of this phrase “a righteousness from God,” is absolutely critical to a correct understanding Paul’s gospel. And like most critical phrases and verses in Romans, this one is hotly disputed and requires a fair bit of discussion and explanation.

The traditional Protestant position is simply that when the gospel is preached, God gives a righteous status to sinners as a gift through the means of faith.¹⁵ Thus the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ should be rendered as in the NIV—“*a righteousness from God.*” This is what we mean when we speak of justification, by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. It is what Martin Luther had in mind when he spoke of an “alien” righteousness, that is, a righteousness which is not our own and which is freely given us by God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Since the verb ἀποκαλύπτεται (“is revealed”) is in the present tense, this indicates that whenever the gospel is preached, God bestows a righteous status upon all who believe. This righteous status refers to both an acquittal from the guilt of sin, and to the fact that the one so acquitted is also regarded as being in full conformity to a norm, in this case, the law of God. When this righteous status is conferred by God upon all those who trust in Jesus Christ, this is what we mean when we speak of being justified. When we are justified, we are regarded as acquitted from the guilt of sin, and in perfect conformity to the

¹³ B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of Faith" in Biblical Doctrines (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 502-04.

¹⁴ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.91.

¹⁵ The phrase is understood as a genitive of origin.

commandments of God, even though we remain sinners. And this is what Luther meant, when he spoke of Christians as *simul iustus et peccator*. That is, we are simultaneously “justified” and “sinner.” This also means that Paul is referring to an instantaneous declaration made by God about the sinner in light of the cross, and not to any process of moral transformation of the sinner as the Roman Catholic Church erroneously teaches.¹⁶ If we are not clear about this, we will not be very clear about the gospel.

In the last fifty-years or so, a growing number of critical Protestant scholars have embraced the idea that the righteousness of God, referred to here by Paul, does not at all refer to a status God bestows upon a sinner, but instead has to do with the activity of God, in which God’s sovereignty over all of the world is being revealed eschatologically through Jesus Christ.¹⁷ On this view, then, the phrase, δικαιοσύνη θεου, should be rendered, “*God’s righteousness*,” and not a “*righteousness from God*.” In other words, in the gospel, God demonstrates that he is righteous. When Jesus dies on the cross and rises from the dead, God vindicates his purposes for his people Israel, and demonstrates that God will now root out all evil and injustice from all of creation.¹⁸ While there are a number of arguments raised in favor of this view, the main reason we are told that this reading should be adopted is because Paul supposedly uses the phrase in Romans exactly the way in which it was used in throughout Old Testament and 2nd temple Judaism.¹⁹ Indeed. A number of Old Testament passages connect the righteousness of God and his faithfulness to the covenant as well to his creation (see Psalm 98:1-2; Isaiah 46:13; 51:5-8; 56:1; 62:1).²⁰ Thus, it is argued, Paul uses the phrase the “God’s righteousness” in the same way as the Jews, and that it refers to God’s sovereign right to lay claim to all of creation, not to the righteous status of a sinner.

There are a number of reasons why the later interpretation—that the righteousness of God refers strictly to a divine activity and not a righteous status conferred upon sinners—fails to do justice to Paul’s overall theology. Take, for example, Romans 10:3-4, where Paul writes of his fellow Jews, “*since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*” In this text, Paul clearly speaks of the righteousness which justifies as coming from God. Paul is not merely echoing the first century Jewish understanding of the righteousness of God. Rather, Paul is

¹⁶ See Cranfield’s very helpful discussion of this, in Commentary on Romans, I.93-95.

¹⁷ The phrase “the righteousness of God” is understood as a subjective genitive. See Ernst Kasemann, Commentary on Romans (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1892), pp. 21-32; Peter Stuhlmacher, Paul’s Letter to the Romans (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 29-32.

¹⁸ N. T. Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., Pauline Theology, Volume III (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 33-34.

¹⁹ There are also attempts by some, such as Moo, to combine elements of both positions. See Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 71-75.

²⁰ Stuhlmacher mentions Deuteronomy 33:21, Judges 5:11, 1 Samuel 12:7, Micah 6:5, Psalm 103:6 and Daniel 9:16, as texts which are “filled with demonstrations of the righteousness of God” in procuring salvation and deliverance.” He goes on to state “in the second part of the book of Isaiah (cf. Isa. 45:8; 23f.; 51:6, 8) and in the Psalms (cf. Pss. 71:19; 89:17; 96:13; 98:9; 111:3), God’s righteousness is praised as that absolute activity of God which creates the order of salvation and well being.” See Stuhlmacher, Paul’s Letter to the Romans, p. 30.

correcting the Jewish misunderstanding of God's righteousness in light of the coming of Christ!

The same thing is found in Philippians 3:9, when Paul speaks of desiring to be found in Christ, "*not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*" Once again, the righteousness of which Paul speaks comes from God through the means of faith, not through obedience to the law. And then when we read in 1 Corinthians 1:30: "*it is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption,*" it is clear that the righteousness which God freely gives us through faith, is the righteousness of Christ himself.

These texts, it seems to me, not only speak of the very thing we are told Paul does not address when he speaks of the righteousness of God—the status of the sinner—but in very next clause of Romans 1:17, Paul will speak of this righteousness which is revealed in the gospel as coming to us through faith. This, it seems to me, is a very decisive argument in favor of the historic Protestant interpretation.²¹ The very fact that Old Testament writers speak of righteousness as a divine activity makes perfect sense when we consider what God now does for sinners in the person of Jesus Christ. God justifies sinners, by declaring them righteous and removing from them the guilt of their sins. Hence, God reckons sinners as righteous as a free gift, and then unites them to the person of his son through faith, who has died for them and who has been raised for their justification, and in whom, we are now told, they will have eternal life.

Therefore, in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, *a righteousness* which Paul goes on to say, "*is by faith from first to last.*" Literally in the Greek text, this phrase reads, "out of faith and into faith," or "from faith to faith." The basic idea is that since a righteousness from God is revealed whenever the gospel is preached, the goal of that gospel is creation of faith and the gift of righteousness. Paul is emphasizing the fact this righteous status is granted by faith, through faith, and does not come through any other means. This means that first part of the clause ("out of faith") is reinforced by the second clause ("into faith") and is in many ways similar to the expression, *sola fide*.²² Faith is the only way God's gift of righteousness can be received. Taking all of this together, I understand Paul to mean that whenever the gospel is preached, God reveals a righteous status as a free gift, offered to sinners through the means of faith, and through nothing else.

In fact, Paul goes on to back this up by citing from Habakkuk 2:4 (part of our Old Testament lesson), when he says "*just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.*" In the original prophecy, Habakkuk was speaking in reference to the Jews, who will live (i.e., "survive") because of their faithfulness to YHWH, while the pagans around them will perish ("die") at the hands of their enemies. But Paul reinterprets these words in the light of the coming of Christ, to mean that all those who believe in Christ when the gospel is preached, therefore receive a righteousness from God and will live, that is, they will participate in the life of the age to come, even now in the present.²³ We should understand Paul to be saying, "the one who is made righteous by faith will live," that is, he will possess eternal life.²⁴

²¹ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.96-99.

²² Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.100.

²³ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.100-101.

²⁴ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 71-72.

Having been give acquitted of their crimes, the guilty will not die, as they deserve. Rather, because of their righteous status, they will live and need not fear the day of judgment, which is for them the day of salvation. This is why in the cross, the power of God is manifest. The dead come to life, the guilty are acquitted and delivered from the wrath of God which is coming on the whole world.

What, then, should we take with us from this very important passage of holy Scripture.

The first thing we need to say is that like Paul, we must never be ashamed of the gospel. Yes, the cross is a scandalous message. Yes, the cross is foolishness to Greeks. And, unfortunately, in much of American evangelicalism, the gospel has become a message about how the holy God makes himself acceptable to self-righteous sinners. While preachers, teachers and evangelists, have every right to be cognizant of the culture and communicate the gospel accordingly, we are never given the right to change the message of the cross to appease the culture. The power of God is revealed whenever the gospel is preached, not when ministers seek to entertain, be relevant and hip, or speak to the felt-needs of the congregation. Until Christ's church recovers its confidence in the preaching of the cross, we will never see a healthy church, nor witness genuine reformation. Therefore, let us all sincerely desire and eagerly pray that we may follow Paul's example, and that we as individual believers, and as a church, may never be ashamed of the gospel. For the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. The preaching of the gospel is the means by which God saves sinners!

A final point of application is that we need to be very clear about the nature of Paul's gospel. The words and phrases used here matter! When the gospel—the message that Jesus died for our sins, that he was raised for our justification—is preached, there God freely bestows a right-standing upon all those who renounce their own righteousness and receive that which God freely offers to them through faith in Jesus Christ, namely the perfect righteousness of Christ himself. In the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed to all who believe, whether they be Jew or Gentile!

And when this gospel is preached, we see a demonstration of God's power to give life and create faith, and to deliver all those who trust in Jesus Christ from the day of judgment. In this gospel a righteousness from God is revealed—a righteousness without which, none of us will see heaven. But if we believe God's promise to save us from the wrath to come, God now regards us as though we had never sinned and as though we had kept his commandments, perfectly. As Paul told the Corinthians, "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*" For in the message of the cross, a righteousness from God is revealed—a righteousness that renders the worst of sinners as righteous as the sinless Son of God!