

Defining the Gospel

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Washington, D.C.

Washington is a powerful city. Relatively speaking so is any capital. A number of years after starting a study at the State Capitol in Oklahoma, I was invited by State Senator Jim Maddox, of Lawton, to participate in a study and prayer group made up of state legislators. This weekly meeting provided a significant education about state government. During one of our gatherings the topic of power was discussed. It was noted that a dominant motivation of many state legislators was their quest for power.

Government and those in it have significant authority and control. Their decisions have a great impact upon a nation or world, some for the good, and some not.

The Scriptures speak about power. The term is used in a number of contexts, one of which is Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome.

Romans 1:

“14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.
16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.
17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Just what do you know about the power of God?

In Matthew 22 we are informed that the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, questioned Christ regarding marriage and the resurrection. They presented a hypothetical account of a woman widowed and successively remarried to his series of brothers. This question was meant to embarrass Christ:

24 "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him.

25 Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother.

26 The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh.

27 Finally, the woman died.

28 Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

Jesus replied to them was with the following words:

"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.

30 At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

31 But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you,

32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' ? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

The same can be said for many today. Few understand the Scriptures and the power of God.

What exactly does "the power of God" mean?

The word power comes from the Greek word "dunamis," or "dynamis," from which we derive the word dynamite. We envision powerful forces such as the sun or a nuclear bomb. We think of power as personal authority or the political authority of such a great nation as the United States.

These examples, however, pale in comparison with God. The power of God refers to one of His attributes. In the Westminster Confession, shorter catechism, we are told that God is Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. We place God's attribute of eternity or being infinite in the category of *incommunicable*. These attributes are difficult for us to grasp. We are finite, placed in a context of time; yet, God has always existed. There is no limit to who He is and what He can do.

His power falls under the heading of *communicable attributes*. In some measure we are able to relate to the latter half of the list of God's attributes provided by the confession. Both Old and New Testament alike frequently speak about God's power.

One reason we find God worthy of our worship is His power. In Psalm 66 we read:

" Shout with joy to God, all the earth!

2 Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!

3 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your **power** that your enemies cringe before you.

4 All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name."

The power of God is what confronts us when we consider creation. Isaiah 40 speaks of the power of God:

"9 You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

13 Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor?

14 Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

16 Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

17 Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.

18 To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?

19 As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

20 A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple.

21 Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

22 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

23 He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

[All the super powers of the world are nothing to Him who is all-powerful!]

24 No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

25 "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great **power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.**"

We can see "the heavens," but they are hard for us to comprehend. The solar system in which we live is massive. The distance from the earth to the sun is 93 million miles. Our solar system is part of a large galaxy called Milky Way, which is made up of billions of stars. Proportionally speaking, our solar system compared to the Milky Way is the same as placing a postcard on the continent of Europe. We are told that the universe can fit some 125,000 galaxies the size of the Milky Way.

How did God create all this? He simply spoke. It was all created out of nothing by the power of His word.

It is this same all-powerful, omnipotent God who is spoken of in Romans 1:

"16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness

that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

What is the power of God? Paul says it is the gospel. What is the gospel? It is a message, a declaration of truth. It is a message that speaks about the great God of this universe. The declaration is that all those who have ever lived on the face of this earth are in great trouble because of their offense to God. Yet even though it would be just for God to confront them with His wrath, He humbled Himself and came to the earth as a man. This God Man, Jesus Christ, lived not only a perfect life but died a horrific death on the cross and was buried in a tomb. Three days later He conquered death and lives today as Lord of Lords and King of kings.

This **historic message** is placed under the category of the power of God. The same power source that has given us this great universe has given us new life through Christ Jesus.

What are the implications of this?

First, the gospel, the power of God, stands as a reminder of the resource that is needed in order to deal with our sin. We have been transformed by this power. It is His power that sustains us and will bring us into heaven.

Second, as believers we have been made stewards of the power of God.

It is our responsibility to understand and proclaim this message of the gospel to a world that is in great need.

In Ephesians 1 the apostle Paul says.

“18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,
20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,
21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

-Reflection-

1. If a friend invited you to a lecture on the topic of the “gospel,” what would you expect to hear? How would you define the “gospel”?
2. Is it true that the gospel is a message in propositional form? Or is the gospel a person?
3. What concerns do you have for Washington, D.C., and those in government?
4. What impact would you expect the gospel to have upon this city and those in government?
5. What is needed in order for God’s power to be demonstrated here and in other places in the world?
6. How does the gospel impact your life?