

# Power

The term 'power of God', when used to describe a person or an object, is used three times in the Bible.

It is used once of Jesus Christ (*1 Corinthians 1.24*); and twice of the gospel (*Romans 1.16; 1 Corinthians 1.18*).

Clearly the power of God is alluded to or spoken of in many other places. The term 'LORD of hosts' points us to the mighty power of God. God is said to prolong life by his power (*Job 24.22*). He gives power and strength to his people (*Psalms 68.35; Ecclesiastes 5.19*). Their faith is to rest, not 'in the wisdom of men but in the power of God' (*1 Corinthians 2.5*).

The 'kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power' (*1 Corinthians 4.20; cf 2 Corinthians 6.7*). And the apostle Paul sought to speak of nothing except what God accomplished by the power of his Spirit (*Romans 15.17*).

But what is the gospel? It is the power of God for salvation' (*Romans*

*1.16*). And to those 'being saved it is the power of God' (*1 Corinthians 1.18*). Twice this term is given to it. Why? Surely it is because God wants us to know the central part the gospel is to have in our lives.

## **Gospel**

What is the gospel? Many make the mistake of thinking it is the message that Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners. And that is the message we are to invite people to believe. Moreover they see it as the way to become a Christian. In other words it is what is needed at the beginning. Once we have that we can move on. But move on to what?

We do want people to know that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life in the place of imperfect people. We do want them to know that he also took the place of imperfect people when he died on a cross. And we want them to know that in his death he satisfied the justice of God for all our sins. But we want people to know more.

We especially want them to know that the gospel is not just for the beginning of our life as followers of Christ. It is not just the ABC; it is the A - Z of living for God here on earth. In other words we need to think about the gospel of God each and every day. And we need to grow

in seeing how it provides for every area of our life each day. The more we focus on Jesus Christ - who he is, what he did, where he now is, and what he will yet do - the happier and more useful we shall be.

### **Three Rs**

Traditionally some Christians have emphasised the basics of the gospel by using three words beginning with the letter R: ruin, redemption and regeneration. We can see why. If we are to understand what God has provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ we need to know, first, we are in a state of ruin.

### **Ruin**

This word *ruin* is used to describe the fact that mankind is not what he should be. We were created, male and female, to enjoy, love and serve God. By nature we do not. Instead, being proud and self-centred, we prefer to do things our way. The idea of obeying God is alien to us. This is true for all of us. The way we rebel may express itself differently in different people. Some become hardened criminals; some despotic dictators; and some gentle folk who keep themselves to themselves. But all are characterised by the same essential trait. We are self-centred rather than God-centred. We are in a state of spiritual ruin. As a result out of us come all sorts of horrible

things - lies and lusts, blasphemies and beastliness, self-righteousness and selfishness.

### **Redemption**

What is needed? The answer is *redemption*. We need to be set free. By nature mankind is in a state of bondage. He is a slave to sin. We may be reluctant to admit this but it is the only explanation for the plight of man that fits the facts.

A careful look at our own lives illustrates the point. Why do we go on making the mistakes we do? We may try hard to avoid getting upset or angry when things do not go the way we want but upset and angry is what we become. We may feel ashamed at ourselves for using bad language from time to time - or even often - yet we drop into using it even on occasions when we regret it.

History demonstrates vividly the enslavement of mankind to selfishness. It can be seen as a driving force behind great political and military leaders. It is seen in the activities of sportsmen and industrialists and financiers. It is seen in our lives as well. We just need to ask our loved ones. If they are honest they will affirm that we are far from perfect. Moreover, the more we discover about ourselves as the days, months and years pass by

the more we realise the humbling truth that we cannot help ourselves. We simply cannot make ourselves better. We cannot make ourselves new. Imperfect we are and imperfect we remain. This is true for us no matter how many self-improvement efforts we attempt. It is true for us no matter how many times we try to do things in a new way. The fact we are slow to grasp - but fact it is - is that we are in a state of bondage.

Physically we know we are in bondage to decay. We cannot stop the ageing process. The grey hair, the wrinkles and the aching limbs come upon us all sooner or later. We shall all grow old and die.

Morally we are also in a state of bondage. Ultimately we cannot say no to self. Pride and selfishness rear their ugly heads in all we do, even in our best deeds.

Spiritually we are also in bondage. We are unable, in ourselves, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength all of the time. Try as we might, it is impossible. We sin over and over again day in and day out.

Our great need then is for redemption. We need to be set free from this state of bondage. The good news from God is that he has provided the way out of the spiritual

mess we are in. It is found in Jesus Christ. It is to be found in him alone.

### **Regeneration**

The gospel does not just inform us that God has provided the redemption in Christ Jesus. It also asserts that he works in his people by his Spirit. One of the great works of the Holy Spirit is to teach us just what the deeds and words of Christ Jesus demonstrate and mean. They show that he is God made man, for no man has the power to do what he did. And no ordinary man can make the claims he made. Yes, he was a man. But it must also be said of him, he is God in human form.

But the Spirit does more. He who opens our minds to see what a wonderful person Jesus Christ is also opens our hearts. He deals with the heart of stone within us (a term used in the Bible to describe us in our natural fallen state of bondage to sin and decay). And he puts within us hearts of flesh (a Bible term to describe spiritual renewal). This great work of renewal is also described as regeneration.

We find two terms: regeneration and sanctification. The former refers to the beginning of new life in Christ. As Jesus said to Nicodemus (*John 3*) we must be born again. Regeneration is a single work that is

not repeated. Sanctification refers primarily to the on-going work of the Holy Spirit within us. He who makes us new, and sets us apart as belonging to God through faith in Jesus Christ, also goes on working within us to make us more like The Lord Jesus.

### **Growth**

The terms ruin, redemption and regeneration are therefore very helpful when it comes to summarising the gospel message. However our task is to avoid falling into a state of presuming we have said all that can be said about the gospel if we use these words.

There is always the danger that we will try to take short-cuts when it comes to living as God's people. God does not want us to behave that way. He wants us to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He wants us to discover more and more about him. He also wants us to know him better. Hence we are called not just to grow in knowledge but in the *grace* and *knowledge* of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3.18).

### **Riches**

This is why we have the Bible. God has given us his word so that we may grow. When we listen to or read the Bible we discover more and more about the gospel. We come across

words like propitiation and justification, as well as words like creation and heaven. There are many more. Each is used so that we might grow in our understanding. We need to see more and more how the gospel is not just the beginning, the ABC, but the A to Z of a Christian's life.

The questions that therefore arise are two. First, do we love the gospel of God? And, secondly, are we growing in our experience and knowledge of the gospel?

Perhaps we should change the word 'we' in the questions. It might be more telling if we replaced the plural pronoun (we) with the singular (I). Why? Because they are questions we do well to ask ourselves as individuals, and not just of each other.

Each of us can know what Paul knew. The gospel of Jesus Christ alone is the power of God for salvation.