

Paul introduces himself in dramatic fashion to the Roman Christians.

His self-introduction takes into account that these believers in Jesus Christ already know a lot about the gospel, though they know it from someone else.

At Romans 1:16-17 Paul presents his conception of the gospel. Using a figure of speech (*'litote'*) to say a positive thing in a negative way, Paul declares his absolute commitment to the gospel — “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” He then declares that the gospel is not a set of doctrines, or a static list of propositions, or simply a story of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

The gospel is a living entity — a power. It is God’s power — a *'dunamis'*. Another way to speak of the gospel, then, is “God’s power.” This is how Paul defines the gospel: “it is God’s power.” The gospel is alive and active. Later in the letter Paul describes what happens when he proclaims the gospel, that is, God’s power. When Paul proclaims the gospel the Holy Spirit’s power is present and there are signs and wonders (Romans 15:18-19).

The gospel is a power that is God’s power and its purpose is salvation. The whole focus and purpose of the power of the gospel is saving, healing, making right. The gospel is not a power that seeks power for itself. Rather, God’s power (the gospel) is entirely directed towards salvation. The goal of the gospel (of God’s power) is salving humanity’s needs and hurts.

The gospel as a power is a very unusual power; it is a power that is not self-protective but self-giving. It is a power that uses its power to save; to save everyone. It comes first to the Jew and also to the Greek (all who are not Jews). It is a power available for all, which nonetheless respects God’s history and commitment to the Jew.

In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. While the word ‘righteousness’ appears abundantly in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, the phrase ‘righteousness of God’ is relatively rare. What Paul may mean by it has proven fascinatingly fractious over the centuries since he wrote. In fact, theological battles (often with social consequences

such as the division of the church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) have been fought over Paul's meaning. Looked at grammatically, the phrase can mean a righteousness that counts from God's perspective ('righteousness in God'); or it can mean God's own righteousness which is God's saving power and activity; or it can mean God's gift of righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

What is plain is that Paul thinks that a colossal event of revelation has occurred (*apokaluptetai*) in the gospel. The Greek verb '*apokaluptetai*' is the basis of our word apocalypse. Whatever righteousness of God means for Paul it certainly involves revelation — an apocalypse. Something stupendous and transformative on a cosmic scale is occurring in the gospel in which the righteousness of God is revealed. Moreover, the grammatical features of the verb '*apokaluptetai*' indicate that Paul is saying both that this is a continuing event and that it is God who makes the event happen.

The basis on which the revelation of the righteousness of God can be received is faith. The enigmatic words 'from faith to faith' can be understood in various ways: from human faith to human faith; from Christ's faith to human faith; or, although few suggest this, from God's faith to human faith. The last option has the advantage of foreshadowing Paul's repeated emphasis throughout Romans on God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness to us is the source of, the reason that, God reveals God's righteousness. Paul will go on to describe how even though humanity rejected God, God does not reject us. He will illustrate the various ways God maintains God's faithfulness towards us in the face of our denial of God's care for us and even of God's existence.

The righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is rooted in God's astonishing and undeviating faithfulness to God's creation, including fickle humanity. The righteousness of God is a profoundly loving and faithful revelation to us.

The revelation in the gospel can be known only in the way in which it was offered — by faith. God's faithfulness is met by our faith in God's revelation. Yet, even our faith is rooted in God's faithfulness. Our faith is not 'ours'. Paul writes that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed 'from/out of faith (for the purpose of faith). Our faith is sourced in God's faithfulness to us. Our faith is part of the cosmic and wondrous revelation in the gospel.

The power of God for salvation which is the gospel is the source of the faith necessary to receive God's revelation. That this is so is clear when Paul quotes Habakkuk, 'the one who through faith is righteous shall live'. The life that Habakkuk and Paul are talking about is not simply biological life, but the abundant life we all long for — the life of God. Such life is only available at God's initiative and invitation. To accept that invitation requires our faith in it. And this God gives us in tandem with the invitation itself.

Like an email invitation which includes a link to click on, allowing us into the information necessary in order to accept and show up at the party, so God's revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel includes the link of our faith.

This understanding of the source of our faith may relieve our anxieties about whether we have 'enough' faith, or if our faith is 'adequate' or 'correct'. It is not 'our' faith. In the gospel, God is unveiling the magnificence of God's faithfulness towards us is revealed in a way so powerful that, if we pay attention, we will find ourselves invited into the most wondrous of all invitations — invitation into the life of God.

Our faith makes us righteous, not because we have been good enough to believe in the gospel, but because the righteousness of God surrounds us as we exercise the faith that God gives us.