

Deuteronomy 21:22, 23 (Opening)

22 “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ***23*** his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

When we moved here to Augusta, we needed to get a new washer and dryer. We were going to include the ones we had with the house when we sold it. The realtor told us that would help us sell the house.

I started looking around for the new washer and dryer. I had decided that a front loading washer was probably the best thing for Marie, so she wouldn't have to bend down to pull the clothes out of the washer, she could just reach in and pull them out. That's what we had when we were living in Virginia, and it worked well.

Well, Lowe's had what I was looking for, a Samsung set, and even though they were a little expensive, they were the cheapest I could find. Once they were delivered and installed, I found out that they both played a song when they were done whatever cycle they were doing. It was a nice song, but I couldn't place it. I just assumed it was something the folks at Samsung decided would be a nicer way of telling you the laundry was done than just an annoying multi-tone buzzer.

While I was sitting in the office writing my sermon, either the washer or dryer finished, and played its little song. Then curiosity got the better of me. What is that song!?

So, I turned to the place I always do when I get curious. Google. I searched for the Samsung Dryer Song, and soon found a YouTube video of someone's dryer playing the same tune ours does. The best part was it said where the music comes from!

Come to find out, the tune is the main theme for Franz Schubert's "The Trout", a quintet written around 1819. The entire piece takes about 40 minutes to listen to, but Samsung boiled the entire piece down to the main theme, taking about 21 seconds or so to play. A lot of the little nuances are missing, but the main theme is identifiable, and it drew me in to listen to the entire piece.

Paul does something similar in our primary scripture for today. He summarizes the entire theme for his letter down to two sentences.

So far, we've gone over the first 15 verses of Romans chapter 1. In these verses, Paul has introduced himself to his audience (a slave of Christ), and explained his reason for writing his letter (wanting to visit Rome but thus far having been prevented). Now, Paul states his theme for his letter to them in Romans 1:16 and 17.

Romans 1:16, 17

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

This is the entire letter to the Romans condensed down into two sentences. Some commentaries I've looked at have said that this is the entire New Testament condensed down. Either way, this is a very powerful and very densely compacted two sentences.

Let's see if we can carefully unpack what Paul saying here and see how it applies to, well, everything.

First, Paul says he's not ashamed of the gospel. What does that mean, not ashamed?

The Greek word translated as ashamed here is taken from a word that means disfigured or ugly. If you think about classic Greek sculpture, they were very specific about what beauty was. If someone was disfigured, or did not meet the cultural definition of beauty, they were a disgrace, causing shame. So, being ashamed implied hiding something that was not considered culturally acceptable.

Paul wants to change cultural norms here by taking the gospel and making it acceptable. He's not hiding his affiliation with Christians; quite the opposite, actually. Paul was known for getting himself into some bad trouble because of the gospel.

So, what is this gospel, this victorious news that Paul isn't hiding? Paul explains to the church in Corinth in his first letter to them, chapter 2.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

¹ And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

The essence of the gospel that Paul is not ashamed of is, ironically, something that in any other circumstances would be something to be ashamed of. Paul says that the victorious news is that his Lord and Master has been put to death by the most cruel form of capital punishment possible; crucifixion. Of course the real good news from that is that He, Christ, was raised from the dead after that cruel death. Death was the one that lost.

In both our Romans passage and the 1 Corinthians passage I just read, Paul talks about the power of God. Both times, the power of God is pointing back to the gospel.

The Greek word translated as power in both of these places is dynamis (**doo**-nam-is). It can mean power, strength, mighty work, or virtue. It's where we get the word dynamite from. **That's** power. So much power stored up in such a small thing; just like the gospel. Paul says that the victorious news about Jesus is the mighty work of God to rescue everyone who believes it. Sounds so simple, but it ends up being really difficult for some people.

Belief. That's the key to the power of God for salvation.

The Greek word translated as believe is *pisteuo* (pist-**yoo**-o). *Pisteuo* is a verb signifying commitment and trust; to be persuaded of something, or to place confidence in something. But let's jump ahead here just a little bit to the next verse, verse 17. The key word in that verse is faith. The Greek word translated as faith is *pistis* (**Pis**-tis), which is a noun describing the conviction of the truth of something. *Pistis* is the root word for believe.

Going back to elementary school grammar, a noun is a person, place, thing, or concept. Concept fits best here for faith. So, if faith is the concept, belief is the action caused by the application of that concept in our lives. Because we have faith, we believe; because we believe, we have faith. The two go hand in hand.

But before we get into verse 17, let's finish verse 16. Paul says that salvation has an order; to the Jew first, and then to the Greek; or from the Jewish perspective, first to the Jews, then everyone else.

But why to the Jews first? Well, as Peter says in Acts 3:26, just before he and John were arrested, talking to the Jews at the temple, he said:

Acts 3:26

²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

It was also Paul's custom; everywhere he went, he would start in the synagogue, then if he was turned out, he would take the message to the streets, to anyone who would listen to him.

In Luke, Jesus tells a parable that falls along these lines.

Luke 14:16-24

¹⁶ But he [Jesus] said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.'¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.'²⁰ And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'²² And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'²³ And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.' "

Belief is difficult for many, not just the Jews. In 1 Corinthians 1:18-24, Paul says this:

1 Corinthians 1:18-24

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

More dynamite for the fire.

So, now let's move on to verse 17.

Paul says in verse 17 that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. But what is righteousness? Let's go back to the Greek again.

The word righteousness is translated from the Greek word dikaiosune (dik-ah-yos-oo-nay), which indicates being in a condition that is acceptable with God; virtuous. It comes from the word dike (**dee**-kay), which means judgment or justice. But let's make things a little more confusing. Let's look at Galatians 2:15 and 16.

Galatians 2:15, 16

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Here, Paul uses the word justified the same way he refers to the righteousness of God in Romans. Here's the really interesting part. The word translated as justified is dikaiou (dik-ah-**yo**-o), which is from the same root word as righteousness, dike (**dee**-kay), meaning justice.

Jesus himself explains it very nicely as recorded in the gospel according to John.

John 3:16-18

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

God's righteousness through Christ makes us righteous and justified, that is, not condemned but saved.

The next phrase in verse 17 is just as difficult to understand.

The translation I read from says "from faith for faith". The RSV says "through faith for faith". The King James reads "from faith to faith". But if you continue from the previous thought, it makes a little more sense. Our faith in the gospel of Christ reveals the righteousness, the justification that comes from God, which, in turn, increases our faith, and brings makes it easier for those around us to have faith (remember, faith is the noun form of believing).

Paul ties all of this complex thought up by quoting from the prophet Habakkuk, from chapter 2 verse 4.

Habakkuk 2:2-4

² *And the LORD answered me:*

*“Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so he may run who reads it.*

³ *For still the vision awaits its appointed time;
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.*

*If it seems slow, wait for it;
it will surely come; it will not delay.*

⁴ *“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

When Paul and Habakkuk say the righteous shall live by faith, what they're saying is that because of their faith they shall have or possess life. What Paul is saying is that the life Habakkuk is talking about is eternal life.

Paul boils down his entire letter to the church in Rome into two sentences; two very meaty sentences. We've just scratched the surface

of all the deep, theological discussions that develop from these two sentences. In fact, the rest of Paul's letter to the Romans expounds on these two sentences.

The key thing to remember from all this, I think, is that the first step in salvation has to be belief. That belief has to come from a faith, a deep conviction of the truth about who Jesus was and is. That faith leads us into justification, which comes through God's righteousness. It comes through the completion of God's plan to rescue us from ourselves.

Galatians 3:10-24 (closing)

¹⁰ *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”* ¹¹ *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”* ¹² *But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”* ¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—* ¹⁴ *so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

Questions