

PAUL'S PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

The day in which we live in is one where pleasure distracts us from personal responsibility and commitment, liberal life-styles deceive us from holding to the truth of absolute right and wrong and power is used for one's own personal advantage rather than to serve one's fellow man.

The diagnosis of this present generation is that we are, for the most part, a product of others faults and our own responsibility and accountability for our actions is minimal, due to the fact that we are victims.

The problem with this philosophy or any other form of its kind is that it excuses or denies personal responsibility for one's actions and seeks to place the blame on others.

A person is never confronted with their own sinfulness and evil heart which is the heart of man's problem.

Man's intellectual and philosophical remedies are like a band-aid on something that needs surgery, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the antidote to the poison within each of us that will sooner or later destroy our lives.

Our world is living under the delusion that people can sow to the wind and not reap to the whirlwind, but the consequences in society at large denies such a philosophy. This small booklet reveals Paul's proclamation of the power of the Gospel to transform a person's life. [Regardless of their past, if the individual will repent, trust Jesus, and die to self!]

By Pastor Xavier Ries

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PAUL'S PROCLAMATION

From November 1515 until September 1516, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk and Professor of Sacred Theology at the University of Wittenberg, intensely studied the book of Romans. The expression “the righteousness of God” baffled him, until one day, after meditating and pondering, he realized that “the truth,” “the righteousness,” is that of God, which we receive through grace and mercy, justifying us by faith. That realization changed his life forever.

Luther broke away from the Catholic Church to begin what is known today as the Lutheran denomination, a far cry from what Luther originally intended. Through his study of the book of Romans, Luther became free from pursuing works and ritualism, relying only on faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The key verse of Paul’s proclamation to the Romans is the heart of the theme of justification, the Gospel in a nutshell:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” — Romans 1:16-17

Paul the Apostle in the book of Romans sets out a systematic and orderly treatise of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Usually, we think of the Gospel as being preached to the non-believer, and we are correct. However, in Romans, the Gospel is amazingly taught to the believer, something that occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The book of Romans is superb and essential for the life of the church in every age. A book that must be understood and mastered by believers.

Three things that are helpful to keep in mind about Paul as you read this booklet are:

- **His Commitment to the Gospel**
“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ;”
- **His Confidence in the Gospel**
“For it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek;”
- **His Commentary on the Gospel**
“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

PAUL'S COMMITMENT TO THE GOSPEL

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ"
— *Romans 1:16a*

Paul was not embarrassed to proclaim the Gospel. He did not think the Gospel was inferior to the knowledge of his day. How easy it is for us to be intimidated, or be made to feel weird because those around us do not believe the Gospel. They believe it's rubbish. They flaunt their college degrees, New Age knowledge, and then we come along saying that God created the whole universe and everything in it. They look, they smirk, and they mock. The men of science at one time mocked Newton when he said that men would travel around the world at great speed. Those men are dead and gone now, but the men of science that once scorned him have justified Newton.

The name Christian was first applied to the believer as a mockery, poking fun at him. Christians accepted the name; however, they exalted and honored it because it meant Christ-like. They were first called Christians at Antioch where God began to work among the Gentiles. The Jews thought Christianity subverted the Jewish law and encouraged licentiousness. It was a stumbling block to them. The Roman world was also very hostile toward Christianity and persecuted it, especially during Nero's reign. The philosophers at Athens mocked Paul, the man of faith, because he professed and proclaimed a bodily resurrection. The Greeks prided themselves in human knowledge and intellect, and considered the Gospel foolishness. Yet Paul said he was not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul proclaimed that the Gospel was not religion. Religion is man's attempt to reach God. Never confuse religion with Christianity, which is God reaching down to man. Religion consists of rules designed to bring about behavioral changes. Now, you may use many means to bring about behavioral change, but you are only addressing the symptoms of the problem. You must realize that sin is at the heart of the problem and that that issue must be dealt with. If you go to a doctor and he says you have cancer, and then only gives you some medicine for the pain, he is a quack. You need to find the cause, the root, the malignancy, the tumor, and cut it out or it will kill you.

Religion consists of regulations to make a person conform to a standard. Religion eventually causes a person to exalt oneself and to think that he or she is better than everybody else because they do or don't do certain things. Religion is not a step toward God, but a step away from God. It is a downward spiral away from God. It is men having the knowledge of God, rejecting that knowledge, and then embracing their own interpretation.

Religion is a ceremonial ritual that gives an appearance of spirituality and godliness, but is nothing more than a façade. All of us in one shape or form do not desire to be thought of as pagans. So, what did we do when we got in trouble before we knew Christ? We made the sign of the cross or some other religious gesture so that people could see and think that we were religious. Prizefighters do that routinely before the start of the first round. When you are religious and in trouble, you quickly turn to your religious rituals. However, if you are a Christian, you are always turning toward the Lord, so, when trouble comes, you are already trusting the Lord to see you through it.

Religion attempts to merit a relationship with God, but the Gospel is not religion. The Gospel is God's revelation of Himself to man regarding man's lost condition and God's remedy to reconcile man to Himself. The Gospel declares who we really are, and what our spiritual condition is. It tells us truth. Man is not truthful with himself or his fellow man. Man always caters to man. Man always applauds man.

You might be able to tell a perfect stranger, "Hey, do you know you're wrong? You need Jesus Christ. He's the only way." But, how easy is it to tell your parents who have raised you and have known you for thirty or forty years? You can say, "No, Mom, No, Dad. You cannot go through Mary." If they are staunch Catholics, are you intimidated?" If you are not, then you are not ashamed, and that means that you are walking in the supernatural realm. You are walking in the Spirit of God. But don't confuse boldness in the Spirit to mean belligerence or arrogance. That is not walking in the Spirit.

The word "gospel" means glad tidings of salvation through Christ. The proclamation of the grace of God manifested and pledged in Christ. The word gospel appears 77 times

your life? No amount of works, no amount of morality, no amount of obedience can make you righteous, only faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Faith must also continue after Christ's initial revelation in your life. Its an ongoing life of faith; not a life of emotions, feelings, or experiences.

The stark reality is that the Gospel is not attractive to the world. Many people read the Gospel with colored glasses, painting the Christian life as free of pain, heartache, turmoil, and distress, without problems or hardships. Even today many preachers paint the same unrealistic picture. They present the Gospel and Christianity as something which is comfortable, nice, and prosperous. When I read my Bible; however, I read of Christians who were persecuted, lost everything, were hated, and suffered greatly. We have a whole community that calls themselves "Christian." They practice things that have nothing to do with the true Biblical faith; they think God is a genie that can heal and prosper them at their command. On the contrary, the Gospel must be embraced by faith, in spite of what else happens; and be believed as the revelation of God. What is your comment on the Gospel?

Let me close with a note on John Wesley. On May 24, 1778, John Wesley heard Martin Luther's Preface to the Romans, and said, "While he was describing the changes which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation, an assurance was given me that He hath taken away my sin, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Wesley came to salvation through the preface of Luther's writings on Romans.

Paul's proclamation of the Gospel of Christ reveals three things about his relation to the Gospel: his commitment to the Gospel, his confidence in the Gospel, his commentary on the Gospel as the righteousness of God by faith. If those same three proclamations are not evident in your own life, then you are preaching another gospel. It is not the Gospel of Christ.

The bottom line in the book of Romans is that, like Paul, we realize, understand, believe, and live out our commitment to the Gospel everyday; that we confidently act upon the power of the Gospel alone to save, deliver, and change hearts; and that we proclaim the Gospel as the righteousness of God.

The apostle Paul also applies the Scriptures to the life of the justified person who has believed the Gospel. The sphere, in which he or she is to live, is one of faith; not of sight, not of emotion, not of feeling. Too many people today try to live their life by emotions, by feeling, by circumstance, by situation and they end up basket cases. They're never stable, going up and down, back and forth, and Satan has a field day with their minds.

In France, there once lived a poor blind girl who obtained the Gospel of Mark in Braille and learned to read it by using the tips of her fingers. She read it so much that her fingers became calloused and her sense of touch eventually diminished until she could no longer distinguish one character from another. One day, in desperation, she cut the skin from the ends of her fingers trying to increase their sensitivity; however, she only ended up destroying the feeling in her fingertips altogether. Unable to read any longer, the girl felt she had to give up her beloved book. While weeping, she pressed the book to her lips, saying, "Farewell, farewell, sweet words of my heavenly Father." But to her surprise, her lips more sensitive than her fingers, discerned the form of the letters. All night long, she pressed with her lips upon the Word of God, and overcame with joy at her new discovery and God's grace.

What's your commentary on the Gospel? Is it as exciting and passionate as this blind girl? Do you value the Word of God? It is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and to the Greek.

For therein is "the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" The only righteousness that God will accept is the Gospel. Our righteousness is as filthy rags, or menstrual garment. Are you thoroughly convinced of that by the Spirit of God? Or are you just saying, "I know I'm bad, but I'm not that bad," or "I'm not as bad as somebody else," No, No, No! That's not the point. Do you realize that the only righteousness that God will accept is the righteousness of Jesus Christ? That is the focal point. Are you fully aware of that? Are you fully convinced of that, not by my words, but by the words of the Spirit of God?

If you do not agree with that conclusion, you are not a Christian. You are not saved. Are you aware that faith is the only thing that can appropriate the power of the Gospel to

in the New Testament in its noun form, and 55 times in its verb form, and 14 times in Romans alone. You cannot get away from the word in the New Testament. The message from heaven is the only good news that man has ever received. Everything else relating to God is human-based and is either deception, error, or, at best, mere opinion.

The good news and glad tidings is the same message that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds' in the field when Jesus was born. "Peace on earth, good will towards men" (*Luke 2:10-14*). The Gospel comes to us through the Person of Jesus Christ. That is why Paul proclaims the Person of Christ. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not of any man or denomination. Some manuscripts omit the title Christ, but it is found consistently throughout the epistle, as well as through the rest of the New Testament. The title Christ means Messiah, the anointed One of God. Jesus declared that He was the anointed of God. Remember when He went into the synagogue in Nazareth and the scroll of Isaiah was given to Him (*Luke 4:16-19*)? He opened it up, and read, "Behold, the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to proclaim Good News," (*Isaiah 61:1*). He closed the book and said, "In your hearing these Scriptures are fulfilled today" (*Luke 4:21*). Jesus was the Messiah, the Author of the Gospel, and the very subject of the Gospel. They were blown away.

The Bible proclaims no one but Christ, and that was the message to which Paul was committed. There is a story of a pig and a chicken that had a conversation in the barnyard one day. They decided they would help the farmer cook breakfast. The chicken said to the pig, "You know, the farmer could sure use our help." The pig replied, "Okay." The chicken said, "I'll give him two eggs and you can provide the bacon." The pig hesitated, sitting there confused. The chicken asked, "What's the matter?" The pig answered, "Well, when you provide the two eggs, you're involved. But when I provide the bacon, I'm committed." That's our dilemma today as Christians — are we just involved in the Gospel, or totally committed?

Are you so committed to the Gospel that you are not ashamed of it, even when others look down on you and mock you because you believe in Creation rather than evolution? Are you ashamed? It's hard, isn't it? Nevertheless, that is the reality of being committed. Are you committed to giving out the Gospel rather than allowing people to remain in their ignorance or lost condition? Are you so committed that you see lost men, and cannot allow them to remain in ignorance? When those doors to share with others open, do you share with them or are you ashamed of the Gospel? Do you wonder, "What are they going to think of me?"

Paul did not give it a second thought. He was taught as a Hebrew and as a Greek, sitting at the feet of the great rabbi Gamaliel, he became an intellectual giant, and he told the Corinthians, "I didn't come with excellence of speech and words, but I came with the power of the Spirit; for by the wisdom of man men cannot know God, because if they did they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of glory" (*1 Corinthians 2:1-5*). Are you committed to the fact that Christ is the only way to God, or are you tolerant and open minded to include Mary, Buddha, Krishna, and many others?

We are to give an answer to every man for the reason, the hope, the life in us, with meekness and fear. We are to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves, and not clumsy as an ox. But when God opens that door, we better walk through it and share in the most natural loving way through the power of the Spirit, as Paul did — committed to the Gospel.

What was accounted for righteousness? His own faith? No. In other words, he cannot boast in his own works. He must boast in God. He can't boast before God about his own work, but Abraham believed God for His revelation and that faith was accounted as righteousness.

The Gospel of faith is nothing new. The latter portion of verse 17 uses the phrase "as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" to indicate a past historical reality. The prophet Habakkuk was overwhelmed by the coming devastation of the nation of Israel by Babylon as he sat in his tower to hear from God. Habakkuk says, "Lord, tell me what You're going to do." God says, "You wouldn't believe it if I told you, Habakkuk." "Oh, come on, Lord. I'm your prophet." "Well, I'm going to cause the Babylonians to wipe out the Israelis." "Oh, Lord how can You?" "Didn't I tell you, you wouldn't believe Me?" And so Habakkuk sat in his tower and said, "I'm not going to move until You talk to me, God." And God began to talk to him, and told him the just shall live by faith and promised the future restoration of Israel. And though Habakkuk would not see the promised restorations, he believed it by faith through his own confession (*Habakkuk 2:4, 3:17,19*). "Though the fig tree blossom not, nor the vine bear fruit, ...yet I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

The same phrase also points to a future fulfillment. Paul applies the prophecy regarding faith and the righteousness of God through the provisions of Jesus Christ by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to salvation. This type of application occurs throughout the entire New Testament. We go to an Old Testament passage, read it, and then discover that the New Testament passage sometimes changes the words, thus, changing the Old Testament application. Why? Because the New Testament writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were able to take that which was prophetic and set it next to the fulfillment and say, "This is the fulfillment." Therefore, with prophecy, there is sometimes both a short-term and a long-term fulfillment. In this instance, the historical reality is in Habakkuk the prophet, but the future fulfillment is found in Romans. There is only two other passages in the New Testament where the same Scripture verse is quoted — the book of Galatians and Hebrews. In Romans: "the just," the theme of justification. In Galatians: "shall live," the theme of living rightly. In Hebrews: "by faith," the theme of the faith of saints.

Apart from Christ, probably not, but in Christ, yes. What has made the difference? The Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The righteousness of God was the plan of God before the foundation of the world. He prepared it from eternity (*Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9*). He promised it after the Fall (*Genesis 3:15*) in the seed of the woman. He prophesied it through the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, Malachi, and through all the Minor Prophets. He proclaimed it through John the Baptist. He personalized it in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (*John 1:29*). He proliferated it through all the New Testament saints.

We mentioned that the one condition of the Gospel is personal faith on the part of the believer. The phrase “from faith to faith” has been interpreted in different ways: faith that begins in the Old Testament and moves into the New Testament, faith in degrees of measure, faith of Jews to Gentile, faith of preacher to hearer, faith that responds to God’s invitation and trusts the revelation of the Gospel for salvation, as well as faith to continue in salvation. The last interpretation, I believe, is the accurate one.

Even as Paul tells the Corinthians that we are being transformed, from glory to glory, even by the Spirit of Jesus Christ (*2 Corinthians 3:18*). Faith is a means by which a person receives the righteousness of God at the hearing of the Gospel. *Romans 10:17* says, “...Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Without the preaching of the Gospel, faith cannot be activated. Without the hearing of the Gospel, men and women are blind to the righteousness of God. It is through the preaching of the Gospel that faith is awakened, faith embraces, and faith realizes salvation through the work of Christ.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (*Hebrews 11:1*). “Without faith it is impossible to please God, for those who come to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (*Hebrews 11:6*).

Since the book of Romans resembles a courtroom scene, who is the prime witness and model of faith in Paul’s courtroom? Who were the Jews boasting about being their father? Abraham. “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (*Romans 4:3*).

PAUL'S CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL

"For it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

— *Romans 1:16b, c*

The Gospel is the power of God to salvation. The word "power" is *dunamis* in the Greek, meaning dynamic with the idea of natural inherent power residing by virtue of one's nature. It resides in the power of God, not of men. "Power" appears 129 times in the New Testament; eight times in the book of Romans. It is used for the mighty works of Jesus in *Matthew 11:23*, and for Jesus' Second Coming in *Matthew 24:30*. It is used to describe the return of Jesus in the power of the Spirit from Satan's temptation in the wilderness in *Luke 4:14*, and for the miracles He performed in *Acts 2:22 and 3:12*.

The word is identified as the divine power of God, which is unlimited in contrast to human power. Divine power can accomplish what man cannot. It can do what man could never think could be done. The power of the Gospel was in direct opposition to the awesome power of Rome in Paul's day. Paul's letter to the Romans would be equivalent to writing a letter to Washington, D.C., today. The power of the Gospel was superior to the power of Rome, or the world, because the power of Rome dealt with temporal things, while the power of God deals with eternal things.

The word "salvation" is the underlying theme throughout Paul's letter. It means to rescue or deliver, describing the efficiency of God through the Gospel. In other words, the Gospel has a goal and a purpose to save man from his sins. In this prescribed way the Gospel will accomplish what it says it will do. There are no exceptions. It's for everybody. If anyone says, "Well, the Gospel didn't work for me," that's a sad commentary on the person, not on the Gospel. The power of the Gospel works.

Man is separated from God because of sin, but the Gospel can reconcile man to God. Man cannot hide in sin, but God can forgive sin through the Gospel. Man cannot be free from his sin nature, but God can give man a divine nature through the Gospel. Man is a child of the devil, but God can

make him a child of God through the Gospel. Man is under the wrath of God and condemned to eternal punishment, but God can pardon man through the grace and impart eternal life to him through the Gospel. Man is self-centered, but God can make him God-centered through the Gospel.

The Gospel is for everyone who believes, without exception. What a bold statement! Everyone has a need for the Gospel. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," (*Romans 3:23*). That is the reason why the Gospel is for everyone because everyone is lost. Everybody is a sinner. Everybody is in need of salvation. The invitation to salvation is all-inclusive, universal. "Whosoever will come" is the cry of John in *Revelation 22:17*. Whosoever will come and drink of the waters of life freely. Everyone is in need, and no one is excluded from having that need met if they accept the Gospel.

If man was preached, proclaimed, or wrote his own gospel, certain people would surely be excluded. Look at man's organizations — this club, that club — all with their own set of requirements (financial, lineage, athletic accomplishments). The fewer the number of people in a certain group, the higher the prestige because you are the "chosen few." That is man's pride, but God says, "Whosoever will come..." with Him, all are invited.

The only condition of the Gospel is that one have a personal belief that God is able to save man if he repents. The Gospel is personalized. You cannot be a Christian through your pastor. Your children can never get to heaven because you are a Christian. Your children, if they get to heaven, will get there because they have committed their lives to Christ, trusted Christ, walked with Christ, and allowed Christ to live through them. Salvation must be personal, individual, and based on repentance, which is simply acknowledging your sins to God. Repentance also includes confession of your sins, abandonment of your sins, and when possible, restitution for your sins.

Romans 1:16 says that the Gospel is for the Jew first and the Greek second, but the priority of the Jew is in relationship to time, not importance. This is very important to understand because sometimes people pride themselves on their own importance, wanting to be special. The priority of the Jew, however, is linked to time, not superiority.

PAUL'S COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

— *Romans 1:17*

The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God. The word "righteousness" is an important word appearing 92 times in the New Testament, 36 times in the letter to the Romans alone. "Righteousness" means to be in a right standing with God. *2 Corinthians 5:21* says, "God made Christ to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness in Him". That's what God did through Christ. The concept of righteousness deals with the holiness and perfection of God's character. He alone is righteous. There is no one else who is righteous. In the 1960s, "righteous" was a term that was used to mean good or awesome, "That's righteous, man!" This isn't what the Bible means by righteous, in the context of Romans. For the most part, righteousness is what God has provided for sinful man to be in right standing with God. In other words, Paul speaks of imputed righteousness for justification before God. God made the provisions for our righteousness in Christ and if we believe, He imputes it to us so that we can stand right before God.

Paul also speaks of imparted righteousness for sanctification before God. In other words, the Spirit, to live a sanctified life, imparts God's righteousness to us. One is imputed for justification; the other is imparted for sanctification, or being set apart. The righteousness that God has provided is effective. It will honor that which it has proclaimed; the revealed Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's as good as gold. It's as good as a cashier's check. When you accept it, it will be honored.

The word "revealed" is *apokalupto* in Greek, which means to unveil or to uncover, or literally, "is being revealed," an ongoing revelation to the world. It wasn't revealed once and then hidden, but it was revealed from the beginning and it is ongoing, over and over again, even today. It is the same root word but a different form of the unveiling of Christ in the book of Revelation, (*Revelation 1:1*). The Gospel is open to all, hid from none, and available to everyone. The Gospel rejects none — another proof that it is divine. Think about all the different types of people who attend your church. Would you socialize with them otherwise?

The Jews were the people of God chosen by God, not because they were better than others in and of themselves, or not because they were more numerous than others. In Deuteronomy, it says, "I did not choose you because you were more in number for you were the least. I did not choose you because you are better than others. You are just as bad, if not worse. I chose you because I Loved you" (*Deuteronomy 7:7*). The Bible says that love covers a multitude of sins (*1 Peter 4:8*). Love is evidenced by the amount of sin it covers. That is true evidence of love.

Jesus preached first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and then He sent His disciples out to the Jews and Gentiles (*Matthew 10:6, Romans 15:18*). On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the Jews and the proselytes in *Acts 2:14-47*. Paul always went first to the synagogue, to the Jew, and then, when they rejected him, to the Gentiles. The priority of the Jew is in time. The proclamation to the Gentile was in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. In *Genesis 12:3*, God came to Abraham and called him out, and told him that in him, Abraham, all the families of the earth would be blessed. What did that mean? The Gospel. God was not talking about finances or physical health. He was talking spiritually, that in Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed. How? Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. God foresaw the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and embraced the Gentiles as a wild olive branch (*Romans 11:11-14, 17*).

Don't think that the Gentiles were plan B. The Gentiles were part of plan A, because God knows the end from the beginning. This is evident in *Romans 9, 10, and 11*. Paul says, "You know, I don't want you Gentiles to be ignorant about one thing, that blindness has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentile comes in, but Israel is the holy root. They are the olive tree. You Gentiles are the wild olive branch that's been grafted, and now if God cut out the natural branch, be careful as you boast because God is able to cut you off also, if you do not abide." Have you ever read those words? Awesome words. God did not want the Gentiles to be puffed up because Israel was put aside, but rather in His grace called both. Amazing!

Paul knew the pride of man and the boasting of man, but he tells the Corinthians that a veil is over the Jew's face and eyes and cannot be removed until they accept Christ Jesus. That veil can only be removed in Christ.

Luther called *John 3:16* the heart of the Bible, the Gospel in miniature. It is so simple a child can understand it, yet it condenses the deep and marvelous truths of the redemption into these few poignant words: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting Life." God (the greatest lover) so loved (the greatest degree) the world (the greatest number), that He gave (the greatest act) His only begotten Son (the greatest gift), that whosoever (the greatest invitation) believeth (the greatest simplicity) in Him (the Greatest Person) should not perish (the greatest deliverance), but (the greatest difference) have (the greatest certainty) everlasting life (the greatest possession) — the Gospel.

Are you confident that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation alone? Or do you mix it with other things such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, or any other "-ology?" Remember one thing: Whenever you have something that is one hundred percent pure, and you put in one drop of anything else, that something is now adulterated. It is no longer pure. Do you say, "I'm a recovering alcoholic," and attend AA, and you are a Christian? Or do you say, "I used to be an alcoholic." The first statement is not scriptural; the second statement is.

Have you ever heard a Christian describe himself as a recovering fornicator or a recovering adulterer? It's absurd, isn't it? It's also absurd to say you are a recovering alcoholic because the Bible says that you are made brand new in Jesus Christ (*1 Corinthians 5:17*). Don't deceive yourself with a twelve step program. Take one short step — Jesus Christ.

Do you attend ongoing psychological therapy as a Christian rather than believing God's Word and reckoning the old man dead, praying, fellowshiping, being involved with the local body of Christ? I'm not speaking against medical attention. If you have a verified chemical imbalance, then take your medication and then get into the Word of God, prayer, fellowship, and involvement. But for the most part, many people who are on medication do not have a verified chemical imbalance, and they are sucked into therapy and counseling until they are emotionally drained, or their insurance stops paying. It is amazing how many people recover so fast once their insurance runs out.

Are you confident that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, or have you quit praying for certain people who seem hopeless? "I know God can save, but you really don't know my dad, or my wife, or my brother." Really? We are talking about God's unlimited power, power that is able to accomplish what it has purposed. We put so many limitations on God, but actually there is only one limitation on the power of God to save, the power of your will to say, "No, I don't need salvation." That's it. That is the only limitation to the power of God to salvation — your own will to say, "I don't want to be saved" or "I don't need to be saved." It is not that personal power is greater than God's power to save; it is that God will not violate our free will to choose not to be saved. You are the only one who can limit God's tremendous power. Don't be intimidated when people begin to share their life experience and difficulties with you. Give them the Gospel!

The church today, rather than giving the Gospel, has set up shop to merchandise God's people. For the last 15 or 20 years, rather than giving people who have mental and psychological problems the Gospel, praying with them, and helping them through their difficult times, the church has opened up its own psychological clinic, merchandising a diluted Gospel with no power. The people who are making a fortune through psychology are not those in the unbelieving world, but those in the church.