

**THE GOSPEL AS THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATIO IN ROMANS 1: 8-17:
A WAKE-UP CALL FOR RENEWAL OF COMMITMENT
TO CHRISTIAN SERVICE**

ABSTRACT

This paper titled, “Gospel As the Power of God for Salvation in Romans 1: 8-17: A Wake-Up Call for Renewal of Commitment to the Christian Service” argues that there is an urgent need for the followers of Jesus Christ to daily engage in productive lifestyles that will enhance the expansion of God’s kingdom on earth. Experiences in the contemporary time show that some Christians are already falling away from grace; hence, they tend to be losing the spiritual and moral fervency that had earlier characterized their lifestyles. As a way out, this writer emphasizes the need for Christians to be prepared to do more at enhancing one’s loyalty to Jesus Christ through daily Christian lifestyles, as well as engaging in spiritual warfare; thus, demonstrating fervency and commitment toward making maximum impact. To affirm the necessity for this renewal of commitment to the Christian service, this writer has embarked on the study of Romans 1: 8-7 with the intention of seeking to understand the basis for Paul’s declaration of his commitment to the cause of Jesus Christ (vs.16-17). Later, he has drawn some inferences from the exegetical analysis of the text as implications for the contemporary Church in Nigeria. Therefore, the writer recommends that the potency of the gospel message should be properly preached and backed with the power of the Holy Spirit so that this generation can witness the demonstration of the power of the gospel that will result into miracles of healing, protection from physical and spiritual attacks, divine provision, etc.; Christians must readily defend the integrity of the gospel of Jesus Christ, even if it would result in experience of pain and sufferings. Reality of power-encounter cannot be denied; hence, efforts should be geared toward alleviating the pains and sufferings of the teeming masses who need deliverance from spiritual and emotional traumas; and the era of engaging in dynamic evangelism by Christians should be restored so that churches can again witness daily and weekly harvest of souls into the kingdom of God in their hundreds and thousands. Notwithstanding the prevailing negative socio-economic and political situations in Nigeria, the threats and attacks from adherents of traditional religions, and the hampering effects of the activities of Islamic fundamentalists threatening Jihad with their violent attempts to Islamize the country, as well as the Boko-

Haram insurgency in the northern part of the country, Christians should not allow themselves to be unnecessarily cowed.

Key Words: Gospel, Power of God, Salvation, and Christian Service.

Introduction

Christians are the committed followers of Jesus Christ and are been variously described. According to Aboagye-Mensah and Kudadjie, a Christian is someone who has accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord, and who accordingly lives (or endeavors to live) by God's grace, a life that is in keeping with biblical teaching. Such a person has received a new life, and his interests, desires, values and outlook in life have been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in him.¹ All Christians have the mandate to join the membership of a local assembly where they will be taught about the demands of the Kingdom as well as experience moral and spiritual nurture; thereby, seek to be equipped and empowered for kingdom service.

Realizing the need for renewed commitment in their love and loyalty to the Master, believers are required to engage in some acts that will enhance self-discipline such as daily devotion to prayer, Bible study, and worship (personal and family, and or congregational). The goal of such effort is to enhance mutual love, harmony and spiritual growth among other members of the church, as well as to encourage renewal in their commitment to the Christian service. Today, the commitment of several people to Christian service is already becoming cold; sometimes, as a result of carelessness in the pursuit of the required Christian disciplines which can give the devil opportunity to manipulate them, or for some other seemingly unpalatable experiences of life.

However, to be successful in the efforts at enhancing one's resourcefulness in the Christian service, believers need a constant reminder about the nature of their tasks, especially as it relates to dislodging the arch-enemy through power-encounter; the identity and personality of their real opponent, as well as the nature and source of their strengths. Indeed, that understanding will go a long way at renewing their efforts of sharing the good news of God's kingdom with others, so that they too may partake of the promised eternal bliss. In this paper, the writer provides some biblical and contemporary examples of power-encounters. Also, he has embarked on the study of the text of Romans 1: 8-17 after which implications are drawn as a wake-up call for the renewal of

¹ R. K. Aboagye-Mensah & J. N. Kudadjie, *The Christian and National Politics: Christian Social Ethics for Everyone*, Vol. 3 (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1991), 1.

commitment to the Christian service by contemporary Christians. However, before proceeding further, attempts are made to define the key terms in the topic with a view to avoiding ambiguity.

Definition of Key Terms

Gospel: This is a reference to the good news of, and about Jesus Christ. As submitted by Broyles, the gospel or good news can be defined as Jesus' message of the appearance of God's kingdom, a message entailing liberty for those held captive to any form of affliction, and demonstrated, most dramatically, in acts of healing. However, in some instances, the term encompasses the whole story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.² In this paper, the word "gospel" is used as a reference to the message of, and about Jesus Christ, through which human beings of all races, gender and status have continually received salvation, pardon from sins, as well as deliverance from both physical and spiritual bondage.

Power of God: The word "power" is a reference to influences and authority that are being wielded and exerted in the world, which is to be demonstrated both internally and externally. Samuel Akintola argues that as a force, power (*δυναμις*) connotes the idea of manipulation and strength without which efforts can only remain passive. In most cases, power is different from authority because the latter can be earned; sometimes, without being demanded while the former does not come cheaply.³ There are various classifications of power such as political, economic and spiritual. In this paper, the word "power of God" is a reference to spiritual abilities bestowed upon believers in Jesus Christ through which they are to demonstrate extraordinary feats that qualify them to enjoy the blessings of their salvation (both physical and spiritual).

Salvation: This can be physical and spiritual experiences of deliverance from bondage, pain or disaster. In this paper, the word "salvation" is used as a reference to God's redemptive activities through which repentant sinners experience inner joy and eternal blessings of redemption from sin, Satan and death whenever they have access to listen to, and accept the good news about the birth, life/ ministry, sacrificial death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. For this to happen, God's chosen messengers must carry out

² C. C. Broyles, "Gospel," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, (eds.). (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1992), 282.

³ Samuel Olugbenga Akintola, "The Supremacy of Christ's Power in Colossians 1: 15-23 and Its Implications for Student Ministries in Ogun Baptist Conference." Thesis Submitted to the School of Postgraduate Studies at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomosho for award of the degree of Master of Theology in New Testament Language and Literature, 2010); 40.

the task of preaching the gospel while the sinners have to demonstrate active faith in the words preached, and must continue to abide in the stated guidelines for them to grow into Christ-likeness (cf. Rom. 10:14-15; Matt. 28: 20).

Christian Service: Several scholars have variously defined the term "Christian". According to Olajide Abimbola, a "Christian is someone who stands firmly on the truth that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ and the incarnate Son of God; whose living testifies to the teachings and aspirations of Jesus Christ; and whose final hope is to partake in the Kingdom of God and His Christ."⁴ Service (δουλοσυνη) can be defined as the totality of positive contributions being made, sometimes, in a sacrificial manner by all those who have experienced genuine transformation which salvation in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ offers. There is the need to distinguish Christian service from all other human activities, especially those being carried out in the church or related ministries because not all such activities are qualified to be called "Christian service". As noted by Zacharias Fomum, there is confusion in the world today, and people are doing many things which they call, "works of God" but not all works are for God. Unfortunately, anything that is not done for God is the devil's work.⁵ Therefore, in this paper, the term "Christian service" is used as a reference to the overall contributions of a Christian to the continuous expansion of God's kingdom on earth through the use of one's time, gifts, talents/ skills and resources (human and materials).

Biblical and Contemporary Examples of Power-Encounters

The Bible is replete with several records about the reality of experiences of power-encounters in the lives of some personalities. Human experiences in this world are full of unexplainable challenges, and human lives are the fields where the battles are raging. Spiritual warfare is the experiences of conflict, being orchestrated and perpetrated by Satan and his allied forces, to influence human beings negatively so that the individual or group of persons could incur the wrath of God, their Maker. Power-encounter is the involvement of Christians in the struggle for mastery against the forces of darkness with the view to establishing the supremacy of Christ over all other powers in this world. No one can deny the reality of spiritual warfare because it is an experience which rages eternally right from the moment of one's confession of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour.

⁴ Johnson Olajide Abimbola, *An Introduction to Effective Preaching* (Ogbomoso, Nigeria: Crown Heritage Publishers, 2001), 6.

⁵ Tance Zacharias Fomum, *The Way of Christian Service* (New York: Vantage Press Inc. 1990), 1.

The negative consequences of spiritual warfare are real; though, the event is an invisible attack by Satan against all committed believers in Jesus Christ. Thus, for Christians to win the battle of life requires their total submission to the leading of God's Spirit as they carry out their daily events both in words and deeds. However, in some instances, the struggle becomes evident for other human beings to notice. For Satan to successfully wage a spiritual battle against any Christian, he usually engages the services of his demons who seek to launch attacks whenever the victim is off guard. According to Chikaogu Ossai-Ugbah, any demonic attack upon believers is aimed to break the Christian's moral horizon and render such person spiritually impotent.⁶ Therefore, Christians cannot afford to be careless in matters of maintaining a harmonious relationship with fellow human beings (both members of Christ's body – the church, as well as with the outsiders – the unbelievers) because their action or inaction shall affect the outcome of their experiences in the unpronounced but real spiritual warfare.

It is important to stress that believers in Jesus Christ need to make the pursuit of victorious living a daily experience; hence, they are not to engage in spiritual warfare against the forces of darkness with a mindset of being on the defensive position; instead, they should know that they are continually launching offensive attacks against the hosts of darkness. In a journal published by the World Council of Churches titled, *To Break the Chains of Oppression*, the Council stated that though some individuals held the notion that power encounter means enforcements, constraints and coercion in contrast to the freedom of individuals, such an idea is erroneous. The submission of the journal on the issue of power-encounter was based on the result of an "Ecumenical Study Process on Domination and Dependence". The argument put forward in the article was that it is erroneous for believers to speak of the power of God, or Jesus Christ as a counter-power when engaging in the struggle against the negative and dehumanizing forces of evil.⁷ In the article, the Council maintained that instead of holding such faulty idea about spiritual warfare, believers ought to realize that the power of Jesus Christ is not merely reactionary to the forces of this world; hence, Jesus' statement to Pilate that his "... the kingdom was not of this world" (Jn. 18:36), only indicates the reality of worldly power. Therefore, the article suggested that in this regard, it is better to speak of the power of Jesus Christ and the counter-powers of this world; for, they are secondary powers – powers of reaction, dehumanisation, destruction and death. That submission by the journal article is very

⁶ Chikaogu D. Ossai-Ugbah, *Life Without Chains: Basics in Demonology*. Jos, Nigeria: Stream Christian Publishers, (2001), 24.

⁷ *To Break the Chains of Oppression: Result of an Ecumenical Study Process on Domination* Geneva: Published by World Council of Churches, 1975), 36.

reasonable because the power of Jesus Christ is not reactionary against demonic powers; instead, it is offensive, very potent and supreme.

In the Old Testament times, the ministries of Moses, as well as those of Prophets Elijah and Elisha are good examples of power-encounters. For instance, in the Book of Exodus, Moses who represented Yahweh engaged in the battle of supremacy at forcing King Pharaoh of Egypt to release the Israelites from the perpetual bondage by the Egyptians. Upon Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to allow the Israelites to regain their freedom from that oppressive rule, Moses exercised his spiritual authority by inflicting some pains on the inhabitants of Egypt. Thus, different calamities were brought upon the entire land beginning with the swarm of frogs, flies, turning water to blood, plague of gnats, death of livestock, plague of festering boils on men and animals, plague of hail on all green plants, plague of locusts, and finally, the death of firstborn of men and animals (see Exodus chapters 5, and 7-10).

Also, in 1 Kings 18 verses 18-40, the story is narrated about how Prophet Elijah single-handedly fought for the return of the nation of Israel to the worship of Yahweh. According to Mead, Elijah the Tishbite was a ninth-century prophet who ministered in the northern kingdom (Israel), and who challenged King Ahab for sponsoring Baal worship in the land.⁸ To drive home his point of accusation, Prophet Elijah invited the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and four hundred prophets of Asherah, to a contest on Mount Carmel during which a battle of supremacy ensued between Yahweh and Baal. The event was a decisive battle where Yahweh defeated the Baal by miraculously providing fire to consume the sacrifice laid on the altar, a feat which was very difficult for the prophets of Baal to replicate. That singular action resulted in the brutal murder of all the prophets of Baal and Asherah at Mount Carmel with a view to restoring the worship of Yahweh among the Israelites.

The exploits by Prophet Elijah was not limited to only the spiritual contest he organised on Mount Carmel where he defeated the prophets of Baal and Asherah. From the biblical records, in 2 Kings 1:1-17, Elijah also demonstrated unique courage and spiritual acumen when King Ahaziah, the son of Ahab dispatched (in quick succession) three captains of army officers and fifty men in each battalion to arrest him (Prophet Elijah) forcefully. As a prophet of Yahweh, Elijah had commanded fire to consume the captains and fifty men of the first two set for being rude to his office. However, the third captain and his battalion of fifty men were later spared because the captain had approached the "Man of

⁸ J. K. Mead, "Elijah," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament and Historical Books*, Bill T. Arnold and H.G. M Williamson, (eds.) (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 249-254.

God” with courtesy and had pleaded that the prophet should have mercy on his life and those of his band, especially since they were instructed to carry out assignment by the king, possibly, against their wishes (cf. 2 Kings 1:13-14).

Prophet Elisha was also a ninth-century prophet of Yahweh who later succeeded Prophet Elijah, and he had ministered with a company of prophets among the Israelites and Arameans (their kings and subjects). Further, as noted by Mead, Elisha represented something of a middle position between the earlier prophets who associated mainly with specific kings (e.g. Nathan to King David and Solomon), and later, those classical prophets whose ministries could focus on the monarchy, other national leaders or society at large (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah).⁹ Like his mentor (Elijah), on several occasions, Prophet Elisha had to demonstrate that he has the superior power of Yahweh over those of the national gods being worshipped both in Israel and other nations. For example, in 2 Kings 6: 8-12, his ministry successfully saved the king of Israel from the wicked plans of the king of Aram by exposing his ambush strategy which later infuriated him (King of Aram) against the prophet. However, he miraculously ‘demobilized’ the army and brought them to the city of Samaria where they were rendered inactive (See 2 Kings 6:13-23).

In the New Testament, the Book of Acts of the Apostles is replete with records of power-encounters during which the forces of Satan were made to bow to the more potent power of God. For example, in Acts 8: 14-25, Peter confronted Simon, the Sorcerer who offers to buy power of the Holy Spirit with money so that he can continue to put people in perpetual bondage. It took an exercise of discernment of spirits before Apostle Peter can dislodge the demonic spirit in the life of Simon, the sorcerer who had been operating freely in the community for several years. In the same way, experiences have shown that there is a need for the similar exercise of spiritual gifts to provide appropriate deliverance for some persons who claimed to be Gospel ministers but are using diabolical means to perform miracles. Such persons need help, and it will take only divine intervention for the denominational leadership to successfully disarm such fake preachers.

Also, in Acts 13: 6-12, shortly after being commissioned for missionary task by the church at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas arrived at Paphos where they met Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet. He was one of the attendants of Sergius Paulus, a Roman proconsul who had intended to listen to the gospel message, but Elymas opposed Paul and his team, aiming to influence his master negatively. Paul got infuriated in his spirit, and he had to engage in spiritual warfare against Elymas. The spiritual encounter resulted

⁹ Ibid., 254-255.

in the sorcerer becoming incapacitated; he lost his sight immediately, and he groped about looking someone to lead him by the hand. Witnessing the spiritual warfare that ensued between the missionary team and the fake prophet led to the immediate conversion of the proconsul. Therefore, Paul's counsel that believers should be spiritually alert must never be trivialized (Eph. 6: 10-18). Apostle Peter gave the same warning that Christians should be vigilant against the wiles of Satan (see 1 Pet. 5:8-9).

In contemporary times, apart from the biblical records on the realities of power encounters, there are stories of how several Christian ministers in Nigeria have engaged in spiritual warfare with persons who possessed occult powers. Examples include accounts of Gospel ministrations of Archbishop Benson Idahosa (now late), Apostle Ayo Babalola (now late), Rev. Evangelist Job Adegboyega Alabi (of blessed memory), Evangelist Kayode William, Evangelist Isaac Ade Omo-Jesus, to mention but a few. In the 1980s, Idahosa was reported to have single-handedly resisted the planned hosting of the world conference of witches and wizards at Benin in Edo State, Nigeria. In spite of several threats of attacks against the life of the man of God, he refused to shift ground until the hosting of the conference by the Nigerian league of witches and wizards was eventually cancelled.

Another example of power-encounter was the case shared by Evangelist Kayode William, a famous evangelist in the south-western part of Nigeria. In 1988, I was privileged to personally listen to some of his testimonies which he narrated during a Church revival service at Ilaro in Ogun State. It was about a herbalist who had 'worked' on a padlock (using fetish means) which was thrown inside a deep-well under lock and keys so that nobody could appease him to change his murderous intentions against the life of the Evangelist. The plot was that while on the rostrum to preach, the evangelist should vomit blood any time he shouts the name of "Jesus". Amazingly, and contrary to the desired expectation, as the evangelist mounted the podium and shouted the name of Jesus, it was the same herbalist who started vomiting blood in his house; hence, the man rushed to the crusade ground to plead for mercy before he would die. It took the intervention of the evangelist to restore the man to normalcy. Though he had already lost great volume of blood, but he survived.

As a personal testimony, when this writer was a student at the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, he once engaged in spiritual warfare with a middle-aged man (an adherent of traditional religion) who was terrorizing Christian youths at his hometown. In 1994, I had returned home during the prolonged national strike embarked upon by the Academic Union of Universities (ASUU), which was occasioned by the annulment of

12th June 1993 Presidential Election in Nigeria. It happened that one of the Christian youths had embarked on “morning cry” around 5:00 am but that traditional worshipper could not withstand the preaching; hence, with a cutlass, he chased the Christian youth away from the neighborhood by threatening to kill him if he should continue to preach about the delusion of idol worshippers. It was the argument and threats that attracted my attention as a youth leader of my home church (First Baptist Church Ola in Osun State). Because it was early in the morning, no one could intervene; more so, the young Christian had fled away from the scene.

Later, in the evening of the same day, the young preacher visited the home of the assailant to demand for reasons for his rash actions in the morning. The confrontation resulted in further threats of attack with a cutlass, which attracted more people in the neighborhood, including myself who desired to mediate in the looming crisis. At first, the assailant was happy to see me around; hence, he demanded to know whether it was stated in the Bible that his gods (Ogun and Sango) were powerless and that worshipping them is a delusion. In the process of my providing a correct explanation to the biblical stance on the issue raised, that traditional worshipper became angry and more aggressive; thus, he threatened to attack me if I dare to abuse his idol; to which I refuted. The further threats and counter-claims on the power of Jesus Christ had attracted a crowd who chose to plead that the young preacher and I should leave the scene to avoid the apparent danger, but we objected. That audacity infuriated the traditional worshipper who rushed into his room to bring an object suspected to be a charm with which I was beaten, hoping that I would die within seven (7) days, but which I survived. The leadership of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the town waded into the matter and even requested that the case be reported at the police station, to which I objected.

Today, in Nigeria, several efforts are being made by fanatical Muslims to harass Christians, especially in the northern part of the country. While churches have been denied the opportunity to buy land for the building of auditorium, in some communities, it is considered criminal to preach in public places or for anyone to make a public confession to accept Jesus Christ. In fact, under the guise of activities of Boko-Haram, church buildings are often set on fire by hooligans (fanatical Muslims) while the security agents look the other way; hence, church members are left with no option than to scamper for safety. However, some committed Christians have remained resolute and are ready to preach the gospel message at the peril of their lives. Testimonies abound of the missionary exploits of some Christians as well as miraculous escape of some church pastors who had dared to challenge the cases of injustice being meted to Christians in some Muslim-dominated communities. Therefore, it is good to conclude this section by

emphasizing that power-encounter is an inevitable phenomenon in the Christian journey of faith. However, believers must do their best to maintain a harmonious relationship with God so that they can enjoy the blessings of victory during the events of spiritual warfare.

Exegetical Analysis of Romans 1:8-17

In this section of the paper, attempts are made to provide exegetical analysis on the text of Romans 1: 8-17. The Greek text was culled from Bibleworks version 7, while its English translation is culled from the New American Standard Bible (NAS).

8 Πρῶτον μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν ὅτι ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καταγγέλλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

9 μάρτυς γάρ μου ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, ᾧ λατρεύω ἐν τῷ πνεύματί μου ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, ὡς ἀδιαλείπτως μνησθῆναι ὑμῶν ποιῶμαι

9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you,

10 πάντοτε ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου δεόμενος εἴ πως ἤδη ποτὲ εὐδοθήσομαι ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἔλθειν πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

11 ἐπιποθῶ γὰρ ἰδεῖν ὑμᾶς, ἵνα τι μεταδῶ χάρισμα ὑμῖν πνευματικὸν εἰς τὸ στηριχθῆναι ὑμᾶς,

11 For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gifts to you, that you may be established;

12 τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν συμπαρακληθῆναι ἐν ὑμῖν διὰ τῆς ἐν ἀλλήλοις πίστεως ὑμῶν τε καὶ ἐμοῦ.

12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

13 οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι πολλάκις προεθέμην ἔλθειν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ ἐκωλύθη ἄχρι τοῦ δεῦρο, ἵνα τινὰ καρπὸν σχῶ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν καθὼς καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν.

13 And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

14 Ἑλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνοήτοις ὀφειλέτης εἰμί,
14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

15 οὕτως τὸ κατ' ἐμὲ πρόθυμον καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς ἐν Ῥώμῃ εὐαγγελίσασθαι.
15 Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

16 Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι.

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 δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

17 For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous *man* shall live by faith."

The Epistle to the Romans is traditionally believed to have been written by Apostle Paul, and it is generally regarded as one of the classics among the Pauline literature, especially considering its contents, literary style, as well as the testimonies about its various positive impacts upon the faith of many Christian leaders of several generations till date. For Leon Morris, in many respects, the Epistle has genuinely demonstrated it's being a source of eternal power at several critical points in the history of the Christian church based on its testimonies to having impacted more positively on the lives and ministries of several personalities such as Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and in not too distant period, Karl Barth.¹⁰

Corroborating the above submission, Brendan Byrne noted that the epistle to the Romans had retained a legacy of possessing great worth throughout the Christian history; hence, though this Epistle is widely acknowledged as the single most influential document in the Christian history, it has also been the most controversial. It stands on the head of Paul's writings in the New Testament and contains so vast an unfolding of his gospel which has served to present Paul to the generation of readers - from Augustine in the fifth century,

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 1.

through the Reformation era, down to the present day.¹¹ However, Morris had maintained that the letter claims to have been written by Apostle Paul (Rom. 1:1) and that there has not been any serious objection against that claim. Further, he maintained that even the arguments by the few who have raised some objections have not been able to present any weighty issue regarding the style or contents on which to deny the traditional beliefs of the early Church Fathers who have maintained its Pauline authorship.¹²

Further, Morris states that the Epistle was written when Paul was at Corinth where he commends Phoebe, a lady from Cenchrea, a leading port of that city while Gaius was his host (16:23).¹³ Earlier, Vincent Taylor had submitted that Paul wrote the Epistle while he was at Corinth in AD 56 or 57; that the occasion was when he was on the point of going to Jerusalem in order to minister to the saints there; and that Paul had written to restate the leading principles of his Gospel in the light of his experiences with a view to promoting his missionary endeavours.¹⁴ Though there are different reasons raised by scholars as to the purposes for which Paul had written the Epistle, but some believed that he had used the occasion to express his longing and affection for the churches in Rome.

In his assessment, Brendan Byrne submits that consideration of Epistle to the Romans from a rhetorical point of view allows a reader to be more precise about understanding Paul's purpose for its writing. He notes that in "the Thanksgiving section" of the epistle (1:15), Paul speaks of his "eagerness to preach the gospel to you also in Rome." Grammatically, the statement has no time-marker in the Greek; thereby, allowing the primary reference to be a long-standing determination on the part of Paul to pursue his apostolic mission to the Gentiles in Rome.¹⁵ It is indisputable that Paul sees himself as an apostle to both the Jews and Gentiles, and he was not ready to allow anything hinder him from fulfilling his godly ambition and obligation of sharing the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ with people of all races.

Also, stating the purpose for which Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, John Polhill maintains that though Paul had wanted the Roman churches to support him morally and financially in his proposed Spanish mission, but, it was also Paul's desire to share his gospel in Rome. He supports those scholars who argued that the reason why the Epistle to

¹¹ Brendan S. J. Byrne, *Romans: Sacra Pagina Series*, Vol. 6, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J (ed.) (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1996), 1.

¹² Leon Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁴ Vincent Taylor, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: The Epworth Press, 1955), 11.

¹⁵ Brendan S. J. Byrne, *Romans: Sacra Pagina Series*, Vol. 6, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J (ed.), 18.

the Romans contains lengthy exposition in Romans 1: 16-15:31 was mainly to address the concerns which were currently pre-occupying his mind with regards to the nature and power of the gospel.¹⁶ However, some other scholars argued that Paul wrote the Epistle primarily to address situations of the Christians in Rome.

Apostle Paul had completed his third missionary exploit, and he was longing to visit the church in Rome. Though he was neither the founder of the Roman church nor had ever been to the imperial capital city, yet he seemed to have heard good reports about them. Thus, in the introductory section of chapter one, the phrase in verse 8, ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καταγγέλλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ (...because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world) is an indication that one of the overriding purposes for which Paul wrote to the church at Rome was the fact that news about their fervent faith in Jesus Christ is being publicised worldwide. Hence, the goal of the Epistle is to encourage the recipients further to express a deeper commitment to faith in Jesus Christ.

On the issue of the composition of the Roman church, the controversy bothers on whether or not the church was of a mixed race. As argued by John Polhill, one can answer the question based on reading the contents of the Epistle. He observed that Paul never referred to the “church” of Rome; instead, he addressed the letter to “all who are loved by God and called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7).¹⁷ Therefore, it is most likely that in Rome, there were some house-churches, not a single congregation, and that the individual communities might have been composed of varied ethnic nationalities. The contents of the letter contained internal evidence to suggest that the church at Rome was a model of unity in diversity.

Verses 8-17 formed the focal passage for this exegetical study as it expresses the full thought of Paul regarding how the outside world perceives the church at Rome; his commitment of making daily intercession for that church, as well his desire to see many people of varying ethnic nationalities coming to enjoy the blessings of God’s offer salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, commenting on verse 8, Clifton Allen opined that one cause for special thanksgiving in this section of the epistle is the faith of the Roman Christians. Paul rejoices in the fact that the faith of these believers in Christ is widely known. The church is located in the capital city, the seat of imperial power which might combine with evil which seeks to destroy the Christian movement and fight against all its ideals. The worship of the emperor, the idolatry of pagan religions, the excesses of

¹⁶ John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999), 280.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

brutality and lust, the vulgarity and pride, the atheism of the well-to-do, and the deadening effects of militarism and secularism, all constitute strong opposition to the survival of the Christian group.¹⁸ However, the faith of the Roman Christians is “spoken of throughout the whole world”, and this makes Paul express most profound concern by offering unceasing prayers for them.

Apostle Paul was a good example of a prayer warrior; more so, he understood the necessity of fervent prayers to success in the missionary activities. Hence, he prayed frequently for most of the churches and their leaders so that they could remain committed to the kingdom assignment (cf. Eph. 3:14-21). The secret of Paul’s commitment, and his eventual success in the Christian ministry, was hinged upon his continuous prayer. Thus, commenting on verses 8-10, Cranfield submitted that in the statement: *μάρτυς γάρ μου ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, ᾧ λατρεύω ἐν τῷ πνεύματί μου ἐν ... ὡς ἀδιαλείπτως μνησίαν ὑμῶν ποιοῦμαι πάντοτε ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου δεόμενος εἴ πως ἤδη ποτὲ εὐδοωθήσομαι ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς* (For God, whom I serve in my spirit in ... is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now, at last by the will of God, I may succeed in coming to you), as it seems in other epistles, the statement made is the truth of which the readers cannot prove for themselves since it concerns Paul’s inner life. Therefore, the fact that Paul appeals to God as witness is evidence of the great importance he attaches to their knowing that he prays for them continuously.¹⁹ The goal of Paul’s declaration about his spiritual action might be to show how much passion and longing he has toward visiting the recipients (the church at Rome).

Corroborating the above submission, Barrett observes that in the opening of this section (vv. 8-11), Paul does not only gives thanks to God on behalf of the Roman Christians, but he also makes intercession. Specifically, Paul prays: *εἴ πως ἤδη ποτὲ εὐδοωθήσομαι ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς* (... if perhaps, now at last by the will of God, I may succeed in coming to you). Here, Paul wishes to visit the church in Rome, though he did not find her. Contrary to Paul’s custom of not “willing to build on other people’s work”; yet, he longed to see the church at Rome so that he may impart some gifts of the Spirit upon them.²⁰ Readers do not need to bother to inquire about the precise gift Paul

¹⁸ Clifton J. Allen, *The Gospel According to Paul: A Study of the Letter to the Romans* (Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1956), 13-14.

¹⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 12.

²⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans: Harper’s New Testament Commentaries* (London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 24-25.

had in mind in the passage here because the prevailing beliefs of the church are that the church needs all the spiritual gifts to function effectively.

It can be deduced from the passage (verses 12-14) that the basis of Paul's longings and intention to visit the church at Rome was not only for him to impart on the believers with spiritual gifts that he possessed; rather, the aim was also to enable him derive some benefits of mutual interests. Hence, Paul's statement: ...συμπαρακληθῆναι ἐν ὑμῖν διὰ τῆς ἐν ἀλλήλοις πίστεως ὑμῶν τε καὶ ἐμοῦ (... that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine) is very clear. As noted by Bryne, sensing that he may have communicated a too one-sided sense of giftedness (in verse 12), by way of correction, Paul now adds a note of mutuality, indicating that he also hopes to receive something, as well as to give from these mature Christians whose faith is renowned. However, following his explanation of the first aim earlier expressed in verse 12, Paul gives the second reason for his intended visit, which is to have "some fruits from among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles."²¹ In this passage, it becomes evident that Paul considers his longing as an opportunity to fulfill his missionary obligation of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere. His purpose in this regard was to successfully have a nucleus of committed believers whose passion for God's kingdom will increase daily, irrespective of their racial and economic status.

The phrase, Ἑλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνοήτοις ὀφειλέτης εἰμί, (I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish), is open to different interpretations. As argued by Cranfield, given Paul's reference to his Gentile mission in the preceding verse, it can be inferred to mean that Paul is explaining his obligation to share the gospel message among both the Jews and Gentiles.²² However, it is still to be decided whether 'the Greeks' are identical with 'the wise', and 'the barbarians' with 'the foolish', or whether Paul's two pairs represent two different groupings of the same totality. Though the second view has had supporters from early times down to the present, but several considerations will make one to now regard this view as more probable. For some scholars, the division of the recipients into Greeks and Barbarians was so well established as to make an explanation of it in different terms superfluous.

In the view of some other scholars, the phrase 'both to the wise and to the foolish' would not be particularly illuminating an explanation of 'both to the Greeks and to the

²¹ Brendan S. J. Byrne, *Romans: Sacra Pagina Series*, Vol. 6, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. (ed.), 18.

²² Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 15-16.

barbarians’, since it would be appropriate only if understood on merely conventional level. Though Paul quite often does use ‘wise’ and ‘wisdom’ in a more or less ironical way, there is nothing in this context to suggest that he is doing so here; however, if the term ‘wise’ and ‘foolish’ are intended at all, then, they can hardly be used for ‘Greek’ and ‘barbarians’. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the division made by Paul is by their educational status, not worth as individuals because all who possess faith in Jesus Christ are valuable tools in God’s hands and should never be despised.

In verses 15-17, Paul presented his theology about the nature of the gospel. For him, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all human beings irrespective of gender, race or economic status. Vernon McGee opined that this section of the Epistle (vs. 14-17) contains Paul’s three “I AMs”. Whereas in verse 14, Paul confessed the ground for his commitment and pursuit by stating, “I am a debtor both to the Greeks and Barbarians, both to the wise and foolish”, in verses 15-16, he states, “That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God...”²³ By implication, Paul declares his readiness to pay the debt he owed; hence, his resolve to preach the gospel to all who are in Rome.

Expounding further on verses 15-17, McGee stated that it in the text, it can be inferred that in the opinion of Paul, the gospel has the innate power because it is the power of God unto salvation. However, in this sense, salvation is all-embracing; it includes everything from justification to glorification. Salvation is both an act and a process.²⁴ Also, the gospel is “first to the Jews and the Greeks” because it is for everyone; it includes the entire human race, irrespective of geographical, racial or religious barriers. It is universal in scope.

W. E. Best stated that in verse 16, Paul asserted the boldness of his understanding of the power of the gospel when he declares: “I am not ashamed of the gospel”. The word has an emotional effect on every child of God. It indicates that Paul cannot remain passive or stoical in the presence of God’s word. Paul was not ashamed of his message, whether he was in the religious Jerusalem, philosophical Athens, commercial Ephesus, immoral Corinth or powerful Rome.²⁵ Also, commenting on verses 16-17, Elmer Gray stated that one way to emphasise the value of something is to say that the opposite of it is not true –

²³ Vernon J. McGee, *The Epistle to the Romans: Chapters 1-8* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 30-31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁵ W. E. Best, *A Comprehensive Review of Romans*, volume 1 (Illinois, Texas: South Belt Assembly of Christ, 1992), 23-24

using Litotes, a grammatical device. Thus, to show Paul's confidence in the power of the gospel, he expressed his unashamedness in its power. His confidence was so great that he declares that nothing about it caused him the least embarrassment.²⁶

Corroborating the above, while commenting on verses 16-17, Theodore Epp affirmed that Paul knew that the gospel was not inferior to any idea or reality; it has been put to the test and never has once resulted to failure. In fact, for Paul, the gospel is never one of the several remedies for the problem of sin because it cannot be classified as part of a cure or a dogma; instead, it is the living reality oozing from the person of Jesus Christ.²⁷ The gospel is good news for which he (Paul) has no reason to be ashamed; it is the demonstration of the power of God unto salvation.

Most scholars have argued that verse 17 contains the central theme of the Epistle to the Romans, especially as it presents the basis for Paul's confidence in the power of the gospel. Griffith Thomas submitted that verse 17 presents the basis for the efficacy of the gospel. For Thomas, the reason why the gospel is God's power is that it reveals, provides and bestows God's righteousness. Therefore, the gospel reveals the righteousness of God which is in accord with His nature and character.²⁸ In the same vein, W. E. Best argued that Paul's theme of the Epistle to Romans is the righteousness of God which the gospel reveals; the God's kind of righteousness which no one can receive except by the Spirit of regeneration.²⁹ For Best, a perfect analogy to this kind of righteousness is II Peter 1:3-4, thus: *"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."* The result is that believers in Jesus Christ are made to partake of the righteousness of God which is based on his character.

Implications of Gospel As the Power of God for Salvation in the Contemporary Society

²⁶ Elmer L. Gary, "Not Ashamed of the Gospel," in *Illustrating Paul's Letter to the Romans*, compiled by James E. Hightower, Jr. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1984), 14.

²⁷ Theodore H. Epp, *Saved by Faith: Romans, Volume 1* (Downers' Grove, USA: Back to the Bible Publications, 1996), 10-11.

²⁸ Griffith W. H. Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: A Devotional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. M. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 62.

²⁹ Best, *A Comprehensive Review of Romans*, volume 1, 25.

This section of the paper presents some implications of the gospel as the power of God for salvation in Romans 1: 8-17 as a wake-up call to renewing commitment to the Christian service in contemporary times. The implications are gleaned from the exegetical study of the text as:

First, the potency of the gospel message cannot be over-emphasized. Though, the contemporary society is beset with the evils of post-modernism, New Age Movements, religious pluralism, cum the challenging reports about activities of fake preachers. However, the potency of the gospel message cannot be denied. If properly preached and backed with the power of the Holy Spirit, this generation can witness the demonstration of the power of the gospel that will result into miracles of healing, protection from physical and spiritual attacks, divine provision, etc.

Second, Christians must readily defend the integrity of the gospel of Jesus Christ, even if it would result in experiences of pain and sufferings. The popular adage, “The sweetness of the porridge is in its taste” is forever relevant. The human society cannot be fully persuaded to value the potency of the gospel of Jesus Christ until the Christian Ministers project it appropriately. Experiences of power-encounter cannot be denied; hence, efforts should be geared toward alleviating the pains and sufferings of the teeming masses who needed deliverance from spiritual and emotional traumas.

Third, contemporary gospel ministers should renew their commitment to the Christian service. The era of dynamic evangelism by Christians should be restored so that churches can again witness daily and weekly harvest of souls into the kingdom of God in their hundreds and thousands. Notwithstanding the prevailing socio-economic and political situations in Nigeria, and the hampering effects of the activities of Islamic fundamentalists threatening Jihad with their violent attempts to Islamise the country, as well as the Boko-Haram insurgency in the northern part of the country, Christians should not allow themselves to be unnecessarily cowed.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the basis for the declaration by Apostle Paul that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all human beings. The writer has provided catalogues of biblical records and the testimonies in the contemporary days to uphold the fact that experiences of power-encounters are real, and that Christians cannot afford to remain passive in the face of harassments, religious persecution and troubles. The paper has also used exegetical analysis of the focal passage (Rom. 1: 8-17) to peep into the mind of Apostle Paul the basis for his audacious statement that he is not ashamed to preach the

gospel. It was discovered that both from his faith and missionary experiences, Paul had enough reasons to boast about the potency of the power of the gospel. Therefore, it is recommended that contemporary gospel ministers should also be fervent in their commitment to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.