

Romans: The Goal of Paul's Mission

Romans 15:14-21

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 15 and to the 14th verse. We have now worked our way through a marvelous section of the book of Romans chapters 12 through 15 in which Paul spells out something of the Christian way of life.

Last week we came to the end of that section and indeed the end of the main argument of the book of Romans, but we said even then that Paul had much more to say in the remainder of Chapter 15 and in chapter 16. That was the end of his application of his doctrine of justification, but he has more to say.

Tonight we will begin a new section of the book. Indeed Paul spells out in the rest of this chapter, from verses 14 forward, his plan and pattern and goals and prayer for ministry. Tonight we are going to have an opportunity to look at his plan and pattern of ministry together. Let's hear God's word here in Romans 15 beginning in verse 14.

And concerning you my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another. But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of sign and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation; but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."

Amen and thus ends this reading of Gods holy and inspired and inerrant word. May he write it's eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Lord we thank you for this word of encouragement and energy and exhortation from Paul. We pray that we would take heed even as he explains to us his ministry or what this word has to say to us about how we view the Christian life. About the things that we care most about. About the things that we glory in. About the things that we ought to be aspiring too teach us from it we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.

As I said, in this brief passage, Paul tells us something of his plan and pattern of ministry. He tells us of his desire to go to places where the gospel had not been heard. He tells us about his desire to see people converted to Christ who have never heard His name named. He tells us about his desire, not simply to be the one who sees a person make a profession of faith in Christ, but the one who sees a person built up by the Holy Spirit, changed, transformed, growing, a real disciple. He tells the Romans why he wrote to them and why he wrote so boldly and he gives a beautiful estimation what he sees in them in terms of the spirits work in sanctification. I would like to look at some of those things with you tonight. Paul is not just describing for us something that has no relevance to other Christians but himself. He's not just telling you how he went about his business because he wanted to talk about himself. Paul is sharing with us his designs in ministry and his desires in ministry and his goals in ministry and his pattern in ministry because he wants these things to capture our hearts too. He wants us to think in these terms in the way we relate to one another. He wants us to think in these terms as we view ourselves as disciples in the world who are witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'd like for you to see five things that we learn in this passage tonight. I have five **Es** for you. In verse 14, we see Paul's estimation of the Romans Christians. Paul's estimation of the Romans Christians. In verses 15 and 16, we see his explanation for why he wrote so boldly. In verse 17, we see his exaltation in his ministry. In verses 18 and 19, we see his evangelization, we see his description of what he did round about from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricium. In verses 20 and 21, we see what we might call his expedition or if you want to drop the **Es**, his aspiration. Let's look at these verses together.

I. Paul's estimation.

First in verse 14, Paul's estimation. Here in verse 14 you get Paul's words of compliment to the Romans church. You might have thought Paul was scolding the Romans Christians in chapters 14 and the first part of chapter 15. You might have though he was getting on them a bit about how they get along with one another. No doubt they had sins and no doubt they had ways to grow.

In verse 14 of Romans 15, Paul gives a compliment to the Roman Christians. He gives them an assurance of how he sees them just in case the Romans miss understand the vehemence with which he writes the letter. Paul can get carried away when he is writing. You can feel the intensity of this man as he writes to the people of God in the book of Galatians, and in the epistle to the Corinthians, and in the book of Romans. You can feel the intensity. Paul doesn't want the Romans to misunderstand him. So he tells them here in verse 14, "Concerning you, my brethren, I am convinced that you are full of goodness and filled with all knowledge and you are also able to admonish one another." He gives them this tremendous compliment, he says, I want you to know I see your growth in grace.

But there are a few things I'd like you to see in this verse. Let me ask you two questions. What do you think a healthy Christian looks like? What do you think a healthy Christian looks like? Secondly, if you could list three qualities about a healthy Christian, what would they be? Paul is certain. He is convinced that the Romans church is spiritually healthy and he describes three ways that they are spiritually healthy in this verse alone.

Pause for a second with those words, "Concerning you, my brethren, I myself am convinced that you are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to admonish one another." Do we encourage one another that way? Do we give spiritual encouragement like that? Do we stop and note, "Brother I have noted the way you have a zeal for God's word and I want to tell you, it encourages me," or, "Brother, I've seen you growing in grace and I don't know what's going on in your life, but I have seen you growing in grace over the last three or four years. I can see it in how you are relating to people. I can see it in what you care about. I can see it in the kindness and goodness of your heart." Do you pause to encourage one another in spiritual ways? William Plummer says, "Whenever truth will allow and fit occasion shall offer, we should express favorable opinions of our Christian brethren. Good men need encouragement as well as warning." That is what Paul does here, he pauses in the midst of this great letter to heap encouragement on these Romans Christians. He says, "Now listen friends, after I have said what I said about getting along with one another in Romans 14 and 15, don't think that I'm saying you're a bunch of little bratty children that just can't get along. Don't think that that is my estimation of you. You people are filled with goodness, you're growing in the knowledge of God of the faith of the Bible. You're so mature to confront one another in love." Paul stops to encourage the Romans Christians.

I've just given you the three qualities that he compliments them for. He compliments them for their goodness. See, he has a three fold description of the healthy Christian, goodness, knowledge and capability of mutual admonition. Is that how you would have described a healthy Christian? He's full of goodness, he has knowledge of the faith, knowledge of the truth, knowledge of Bible doctrine. He's able to confront his brothers and sisters in a loving way. I'm not sure those would be under the three things I would have come up with friends. I don't know

about you. Here he is, he's talking about goodness. A person who is opposed to evil and meanness. He's upright, he's kind. He's beneficent.

Notice Paul is looking for the gospel to result in virtue. Goodness is one of the virtues, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control are fruit of the spirit and Paul compliments these Christians that they display these fruits of the spirit. You can see their goodness. Their knowledge, their firm grasp of Christian truth. They had a genuine comprehension of Christian teaching allied with a deep concern to do what is good. Indeed, is that not the goal of Pauline teaching? Truth is unto godliness. Notice how he allies goodness and truth here? They have knowledge of the truth. They display goodness. They know what the truth is for, they use it with discernment. They are mature in their knowledge and they have a capacity for admonition. Admonition is very simply to correct. It's to lovingly confront and correct. He said that these Christians are capable of admonition. These Romans are mature enough to do admonition.

There is maybe nothing trickier to do, in the bonds of the fellowship of the Christian church, than to admonish a friend and still stay a friend, or to admonish in proportion to where you don't become Mister Admonition, or Mrs. Admonition, or Miss Admonition. Every time you turn around you're getting corrected. It's an amazingly difficult thing and it's a mark of maturity. Paul says that these Romans were mature enough to do it. They were able to engage in this reciprocal brotherly and sisterly ministry of church members holding one another accountable to live the Christian live and kindly challenging one another to do so.

You know a healthy mature Christian evidences the spirit's gift of goodness and has a strong understanding and grace of Christian truth and cares so much about the Brethren that he admonishes them and he's wise enough to do it lovingly. That's how Paul describes these Romans Christians. Wouldn't you like to be accounted that way? Wouldn't you like to be thought of in that way? Can you imagine an apostle saying that about you? Just hearing Paul this to the Romans makes you want to be like that. That is the first thing that he has to say in verse 14. That's his estimation of the Romans Christians.

II. His explanation for writing boldly.

Second thing I want you to see is his explanation for writing so boldly. You will see it in verses 15 and 16. Paul feels a necessity to explain himself to the Romans Christians as to why he's been so bold in this letter. He tells us in verses 15 and 16 that the source of this boldness is found in his unquenchable desire to see the sanctification of his converts. He's been so bold in what he said because he longs to see the people that he has led to a profession of faith in Christ holy, sanctified, Christ-like, Spirit-filled.

Paul now explains in verses 15 and 16 that he wrote boldly because of his role as a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles, out of a concern to offer them to God, and out of a concern that they be sanctified and holy by the Spirit's work. Look at his words, "I've written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again because of the grace that was given me from God."

Notice how Paul used his whole ministry as a grace. His whole ministry is a gift from God. Paul understood his unworthiness to be in this ministry. He was a Christian killer. He was a Christian persecutor. He was the scourge of the Church. He was the single most dangerous individual to the continuance and survival of Christianity in the world of his time, the greatest persecutor that the Church knew. He had a keen sense of his unworthiness to be the minister of the gospel and so there was no question in his mind that it was a grace that he had been called into this ministry.

My friends, we are all unworthy of the privilege of sharing the truth about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with those who don't know Him because none of us deserve it and none of us have earned it ourselves. We are right where Paul was. We are right where he was in unworthiness. You don't have to have persecuted the Church. You don't have to have been unstintingly and publicly immoral. All you have to do is be a sinner, by nature a child of the wrath of God, saved by grace to be able to stand right where Paul is and say, "I'm not worthy to have the privilege to lead people to the Lord Jesus Christ, but thank you, God, for the gift of giving that to me anyway."

He goes on to use priestly language about his ministry. Kind of makes a Calvinist a little nervous when Paul starts talking about being a priest. Notice he doesn't use that priestly language of worship. He doesn't use that priestly language of acts of spiritual gathered devotion of the people of God. He doesn't talk about the worship service being priestly. He doesn't talk about being a priest in the context of a worship service. What does he do? He says to us that he is a priest, a minister of Christ to the Gentiles in this sense: that he's offering the Gentiles to God. Just like the priest would offer a sacrifice on the altar to God, he's offering the Gentiles to God.

I want you to notice just a couple of things about his. First of all when is the last time in the book of Romans that Paul talked about a sacrifice? Romans 12:1-2. What was he talking about offering to God there? He was talking about you offering yourself. He challenged us. Remember what he said? "I urge you to present your bodies as living sacrifices." So, Paul is saying here in Romans 15:15-16, as a believer I am a priest. My life is the sacrifice, but furthermore, so also are the lives of those that I help to bring to a saving knowledge of God. I am rendering them up to God. I am giving them over to Him just like a priest gives a sacrifice to God. Not to atone for me. I have already been atoned for. That is the point of the first 15 chapters of Romans. Don't think that Paul is putting in the idea that "if I don't get enough souls on my belt buckle I can't atone for my sins."

He dismissed that type of thinking in the first 15 chapters. But he is saying this, I long to offer sanctified sacrifices to God. Just like the sacrifices of the Old Testament, had to be what? Perfect. So also I long to give Gentiles who are sanctified to God.

Now what is the great message there? The great message is this. Paul was not satisfied with somebody simply praying a prayer or saying that they believed in Christ, or signing a card. Paul wanted to see people's lives who had been turned inside out by the work of the Holy Spirit and had been conformed to Jesus Christ. He wanted to see Gentiles who not only professed Christ, but they had become, notice his words in verse 16, acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. He wanted to see not nearly professions of faith, but heaven wrought godliness in saved sinners. He wanted to see the transformation of life. That's what he was excited about. That's what he wanted to give to God. "Lord, I want to give you people that are on fire for Christ, who love the word of God, who are growing in grace, who are being conformed to Your image."

My friends, we need to have that aim ourselves. We need to have it as our aim to not merely see a confession of Christ, but a transformed life, a godliness worked by the Holy Spirit in those who profess faith in Christ. That's where Paul says his boldness comes from . Why was I so bold in writing to you Romans? Because I wanted to see you grow in grace. How do you grow in grace? You grow in grace through the means of grace. What are the means of grace? The truth of God applied to our hearts.

III. Paul's exaltation.

Thirdly, in verse 17 we see Paul's exaltation. We saw his estimation of the Romans in verse 14, his explanation of his letter in verse 15 and 16, and we see his exaltation in verse 17. By exaltation I mean Paul's words of exalting. He is exalting. In fact, technically what he says here is that he is boasting in his work. Why is that surprising? Well, it's so surprising because what he said back in Romans 3. Look with me. In Romans 3: 27, after giving us a synopsis of the gospel that he was preaching, what does Paul say? Paul says "I have extinguished all boasting." I have exterminated all boasting by the gospel that I preached. I have ended the last boast, it's over. Where then is boasting? It is excluded by faith. That's why it is absolutely mind boggling when he says here, friends, "I've found something to boast about." He had laid it in the grave and buried it six feet under twelve chapters ago and now, oops, here it is again, I found something to boast about. What is it? Well, let's not go there yet. "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God." He's given you answer right there. There are two parts are aren't there?

Paul is able to glory in his work for two reasons. Union with Christ in Christ Jesus. I found something to boast about in the work of God in things pertaining to

God which he elaborates on in verses 18 and 19. In other words, Paul says I'm able to boast because I'm in union with Christ and it is not I who work, but Christ is at work in and through me. These things are pertaining to God. In other words, the things that I am going to boast about are not things that Paul did, they are things that God did, and not only things that God did, but that only God could do. Paul could not do the things that I'm getting ready to boast about. Even an apostle doesn't have a power to do what I'm about to boast about so I'm going to boast about the fact that I'm in union with Christ and it's Christ working through me and I'm going to boast about the fact what I'm about to tell has happened, happened because of the work of God.

Notice how even Paul's boasting turns credit away from himself and gives it to God. So there is his exaltation. He is able to glory in his work for two reasons. Because of Christ and his union with him and because of this divine nature of the ministry. God does the work.

IV. Paul's evangelization.

He expands on that in verses 18 and 19, there you see Paul's evangelization. Paul tells us here about his Christ accomplished Spirit empowered, successful gospel preaching. "For I will not presume to speak of anything, except what Christ has accomplished through me resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed in the power of signs and wonders in the power of the spirit so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricium, I have fully preached the gospel." In other words, through my ministry, the Gentiles have not only given lip service to Christ, they have served Christ in their lives by word and deed. It's been done how? Through the power of the Holy Spirit, not through the power of the Apostle Paul. Through the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit empowered, Christ accomplished ministry has yielded fruit and it has been Paul's desire to spread that word of truth from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricium. He has fully preached the gospel of Christ, which he has already told us is "the power of God unto salvation."

V. Paul's expedition or aspiration.

Then finally in verses 20 and 21, he tells you about his aspirations or if we're going to our Es, his expedition. Paul had a desire not merely to preach the gospel where Christ had not been preached before, but especially to preach Christ where he had not been heard before. He liked to go where there was no Church, where there was no witness, and give witness and build up a church. Paul's aim is to reach the un-reached and to church the un-churched. He tells you this in verses 20 and 21, "Thus I aspire to preach the gospel not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another mans foundation."

Then he tells you why. He goes right to Isaiah and he quotes, “they who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.” That passage is a redemptive historical passage. It's a passage that is describing what God is going to do in the glories of the new covenant. I want you to see that Paul had an ethical application of that redemptive historical account of what God is going to do in the future. He goes right back to Isaiah and he says, “Isaiah says, ‘because God said that,’ that's what I want to do.” God said, that was going to be what would be happening in the last days. Those who haven't heard would hear and I want to be right in the middle of that, Paul says.

That's where our hearts ought to be friends. That's why we as a congregation ought to be excited about missions. That's why we as a congregation ought to be supporting missions. That's why we ought to be sacrificing in support of missions. That's why we ought to be praying that the most talented men and women from this congregation should consider giving themselves to the work of the Lord on the fields of mission, because we have a heart like Paul.

Do we? See, Paul's words to us giving us his plan and pattern just tell us something about Paul and about his heart. They ought to stoke a desire in our heart to have hearts like that. Let's pray.

Lord God, thank You for Your word. Grow us in it and grant that we would be like Paul, like Christ. In Jesus name we ask it. Amen.

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