

A MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS TO THE GENTILES

Romans 15:14-33

Key Verse: 15:16

“...to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

When Paul began this letter, he shared his vision and his plan to visit Rome. He was eager to preach the gospel to them. He was not ashamed of the gospel because he knew it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes (1:16). Paul used the words **“not ashamed,”** knowing that the Roman believers were vulnerable to shame. Paul realized that they needed conviction in the gospel. So, he gave them a great exposition of the gospel in chapters 1-11, and a great exhortation to live by the gospel in chapters 12-15:13. And then, with his two benedictory prayers in 15:5-6 and 13, it seems his letter came to an end. But he continued. He reminded them why he wrote this letter, and he shared his mission, his vision, his plan, and his prayer topic. In doing so, he wanted the Roman church to participate in God’s world mission work. He wanted them not to be just a local fellowship, but a missional church. The church is not an organization with a mission department. The church is God’s mission to a lost world; it must be missional. Rome was a strategic city for the evangelization of the whole world. At that time, the church at Rome was relatively small. The believers seemed to be struggling just to survive. But from God's point of view, they were very important; God had great hope for them. Paul wanted them to have a sense of God’s mission and participate in his mission. We sometimes feel like the Roman believers. Many people's main concerns are how to get good grades and a good job, to marry well, to raise good children and to retire with benefits. In the course of pursuing these things, it is easy to lose a sense of God’s mission. As we consider Paul’s vision and plan, let’s remember the power of the gospel and gain a sense of God’s mission.

First, grace and God’s mission (14-19). Paul began his letter in chapter 1 in a very personal way, and he ends it by sharing his own testimony.¹ Though Paul had

¹ The personal pronouns “I,” “my,” “myself,” and “me,” appear 33 times in 15:14-33.

A MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS TO THE GENTILES

apostolic authority, his tone was not hierarchical, but rather testimonial and relational. This reflects the mind of Christ as a humble servant. Nevertheless, as Paul explained the gospel truth clearly and simply, the Roman believers might have felt he regarded them as immature. That was not the case. In verse 14 he confidently asserts that they were full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. Here **“goodness”** means “excellence of character.” They had Christian integrity. They were morally upright, truthful, kind and honest. This is the fruit of the gospel. They knew God genuinely and were able to teach effectively. Paul respected them from his heart as mature servants of Christ. Yet he wrote to them quite boldly on some points to remind them of the gospel again. Though they were mature, they still needed to be reminded of the truths of the gospel. The gospel is so deep and wide and is the source of life, strength, wisdom and encouragement. We need to be reminded of the gospel every day. This refreshes our souls.

Paul wrote boldly to the Romans because of the grace God gave him. What was this grace? Let's read verse 16: **“...to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”** The word **“grace”** is used in various ways in Romans. For example, we received grace and apostleship (1:5). We are justified freely by his grace (3:24). We live under God's grace and not under the law (6:14). We are chosen as his remnant by grace (11:5). We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us (12:6). Here in verse 16, Paul used the word **“grace”** in relation to God's mission. Why did he say that God's mission is grace? It is because God's mission is given as a special favor to those he loves and trusts. Once Paul said to Timothy, **“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service”** (1Ti 1:12). This grace of mission elevates our lives from the level of working just to survive, to the level of serving the living God. It gives us meaning, joy and purpose that is valuable beyond anything in this world. No one can earn this blessing by their merit; it is given only by God's grace. It is easy to think of God's mission as a painful cross which we have to take as a duty. If we do so, mission seems burdensome. But in truth, God's mission is his grace. When we remember this grace, we can carry out God's mission every day with a thankful heart and joy.

A MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS TO THE GENTILES

In verse 16, the word “**minister**” means “servant.” From the beginning of this letter Paul identified himself as “**a servant of Christ Jesus.**” A servant’s goal is to please his master. Paul wanted to please Christ in everything (2Co 5:9). For example, he wanted to go to Rome according to the will of Christ; it was not his own plan (1:10; 15:32). Christ gave Paul the task of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. To carry out this mission, Paul gave his life to Jesus. He said, “**I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace**” (Ac 20:24). How, then, did Paul carry out this mission? He preached the gospel, not just with words, but with his actions. Indeed, he shared his very life with the Gentiles (1Th 2:8). Paul lived out the gospel truth by humbly serving others with the mind of Christ. He did this following Jesus’ footsteps, as his servant. Paul was a shepherd like Jesus. He took care of people until they grew strong in faith, were sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and were acceptable to God (16b).

Here we can learn that grace and mission are intertwined; we cannot have one without the other. God’s grace is the driving force to serve in God’s mission. Without God’s grace no one can serve in his mission joyfully. In the same way, when we carry out God’s mission, his grace increases all the more. God’s grace is given together with his mission. One who lives without God’s mission is abusing God’s grace and will gradually drift away. God’s grace is not cheap, but costly, and it always bears good fruit. Thank God for giving us his mission by his grace. Do you have a sense of God’s mission?

How did Paul think of his life of mission? He said, “**Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God**” (17). Paul considered his mission life as glorious. In fact, he boasted of his ministry. In doing so, he glorified Christ, not himself. He gave all credit to Christ. He recognized that it was Christ who worked through him to minister to the Gentiles. This summarized Paul’s entire ministry. When Paul obeyed Christ as his servant, Christ worked powerfully through Paul’s words and deeds to lead the Gentiles to obey God (18). Here we need to pay attention to the words “**obey God.**” Paul led people to a life of obedience. That means commitment. It was not to him, but to God. The words “**obey God**” sound

A MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS TO THE GENTILES

simple, but they are most important. Sin is disobedience to God; it cuts the relationship with God, who is the source of life. On the other hand, when we obey God, life and blessing overflow and our relationship with him blossoms. Here we learn the importance of obedience in gospel work. It is easy to think we can do gospel work by making a great plan according to our own brilliant ideas. Many people approach church growth as though it is a business. They apply business strategies and principles to the church. In some sense, it may be helpful. But there is also a danger. It is that one may ignore the guidance of the Holy Spirit to follow the example of Christ through obedience. Paul's success in ministry was not the result of his entrepreneurial skill. When we read the book of Acts, we learn how he obeyed the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even when it did not make sense. In fact, he was a man of obedience. Only one who is obedient can raise obedient disciples. God works through people who obey him. When Paul obeyed Christ, God blessed his ministry by working through the power of the Spirit to perform signs and wonders (19a). So, he preached the gospel powerfully from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum - which is modern day Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia (19b). Let's remember that it is Christ who works among us through our obedience. Whatever we do, may it be from the obedience that comes from faith in Christ!

Second, Paul's pioneering spirit and vision (20-33). Biblical obedience is often misunderstood. Some think of it as blind submission; others as something passive and dispassionate; still others as robotic and impersonal. But Biblical obedience is quite different than these ideas. It is the true expression of faith (1:5; 16:26). It is a dynamic, vibrant and passionate response to God's word that is powerful and effective. Though Paul was obedient, he was not passive; he was full of holy desire and very active. He said in verse 20, **"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."** Paul had always been a man of ambition. In Christ, his ambition was sanctified by the word of God. Paul quoted Isaiah 52:15 in verse 21: **"Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.'"** Paul had a compelling passion to preach Christ where he was not known, invading enemy territory. He was always looking to pioneer a new work from the ground up. This is why he had often been hindered from going to Rome (22). But he did not give up. He also had a burning

A MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS TO THE GENTILES

desire to preach the gospel in Rome (23; 1:13). This came from sharing God's heart for the lost. God is not willing that any should perish but wants everyone to come to salvation (1Ti 2:4; 2Pe 3:9). From Paul, we should learn God's heart for the lost. Philmar Mendoza discovered God's heart for the Marshallese people and went as a missionary, leaving her siblings and a comfortable life. Yet she is more alive than ever before. Let's pray to learn God's heart and preach the gospel to the lost.

In verse 23 Paul said, “**...there is no more place for me to work in these regions.**” It seems that he completed his mission. Thus far, he had really worked hard, risking his life many times. He raised many leaders who were preaching the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. His fruit was remarkable. But he was not complacent. He was eager to visit Rome and share spiritual blessings with them. And that was not the end. He planned to go to Spain, which was regarded as the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). He wanted the Roman church to assist him on his journey. Here we learn Paul's pioneering spirit. When we think about Paul, we never picture him as a doddering old man who should go to a nursing home. Instead, we remember him as a dynamic and passionate man. Pioneering spirit always renews us like flowing water. But if we lose pioneering spirit, we become complacent, and even corrupt. Let's pray to have a pioneering spirit! Thank God for using Elder David Saethre to pioneer a new ministry at Harper College! Let's pray to pioneer a new ministry at the U. of Illinois at Urbana, Champaign!

In verses 24-29 Paul shares his plan. Paul was writing from Corinth and was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver an offering from the Gentile churches. He called the Christians in Jerusalem “**the Lord's people**” (25, 26, 31). They belonged to the Lord who bought them with his blood. They were suffering from severe poverty. Paul was concerned with their practical needs. So, he collected from the Gentile churches a contribution for the poor in Jerusalem. Paul found deep meaning in this offering. It gave the Gentile Christians an opportunity to give thanks to the Jews for the spiritual blessings they received through them. In receiving material help from the Gentiles, the Jews could acknowledge them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. It was a practical way for Jews and Gentiles to overcome the barrier between them and become one in Christ. Then they could glorify God.

A MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS TO THE GENTILES

Finally, Paul urges Roman believers, by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join him in his struggle by praying to God for him (30). His first prayer topic was that he might be kept safe in Judea. Many unbelieving Jews there hated Paul, thinking he was a traitor who was destroying their tradition. In fact, when Paul went to Jerusalem, forty people took an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed him (Ac 23:12-13). Paul asked the Romans to pray for him to be saved from such crazy people in order to carry out his mission. Paul's second prayer topic was that the contribution he carried would be favorably received by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He knew it was not easy for them to receive help from the Gentiles. They needed God's grace. Paul's third prayer topic was that after delivering the offering, he might visit the Romans and be refreshed in their company. Paul considered the Roman believers his prayer partners and urged them to pray. Then he finished his letter with a blessing: **"The God of peace be with you all. Amen"** (33).

Today we have learned from Paul about being a minister or servant of Christ. Christ's servants receive God's grace and his mission. Christ's servants obey Christ, fulfilling his will. And Christ blesses his servants through the work of the Holy Spirit. He shares with us his heart for the lost. He fills us with passion to carry out his world salvation work. And he blesses others through us. However, let's keep in mind that Paul was a mature apostle at the time he wrote Romans. We cannot reach up to his level all at once. We need wisdom as we seek to follow his example, as he followed the example of Christ (1Co 11:1).

My prayer for us all is to have or renew a sense of God's mission in our hearts. For some, this is a new concept. We may wonder what it means. The best way to understand it is to experience it. First of all, we need to surrender ourselves to Christ. He knows our hearts. If we don't really want a sense of mission, it is unlikely he will give it to us. We need to want it. Then, as we worship him, listen to his word and pray, he will speak to us through the Holy Spirit. We also need to look around and see what is needed in our world. As we approach midterm elections in America, we see a nation deeply divided. Though we should all vote according to our conscience as our civic duty, we know that political leaders cannot really solve our problems. We need a spiritual revival of gospel faith that changes the hearts of our people. The crying need of our time is for shepherds who

A MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS TO THE GENTILES

care for the souls of others, especially by sharing the life-giving word of God with them. Is there someone around you who needs a shepherd? Somehow, we need to gain a sense of mission. We may gain a sense of mission by being around others who have a sense of mission - it is contagious. Even if we are young, it is vital to have a sense of mission. God's mission gives us life direction and purpose. It can be the foundation for us to grow spiritually throughout our lifetimes.

As time goes by, those who were once very active in God's work slow down and lose touch with youth culture. It is easy to feel useless and to shrink back. But when we seek God's guidance, we can renew our sense of mission. I am so thankful for Dr. Joseph Chung and the senior missionaries who meet regularly, study the Bible together and pray. They have found a way to serve God by visiting single family house churches throughout North America and sharing spiritual fellowship with them. Let's all have a new sense of God's mission. This is God's grace and true blessing.