

Paul Begins His Closing Remarks of This Great Epistle

Romans 15:14-21

Romans 15:14-21 - *"Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. ¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient— ¹⁹ in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand."*

Background Notes

In verses 15 and 16 Paul reminded the Christians at Rome that he was specifically called by God to be a minister to the Gentiles: *"as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles..."* The word that's used for "minister" here is not the same word that's normally used for "minister" or "serve." This word has more of an official "ring" to it. It was used for one who had the **office** of a public servant. So Paul was saying is that he was called by God to the specific **position** of serving and ministering to the Gentiles. In Galatians 2:7, Paul wrote, *"they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God ...was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles."*

Why did Paul remind the Romans that God had given him this particular mission, the ministry of officially serving the Gentiles? Remember, the church at Rome was primarily composed of Gentile Christians, so to back up his authority for exhorting the Roman Christians in this letter, he reminded them that God Himself had specifically designated him for this ministry.

In verse 19 Paul said that he had fully preached the gospel *"from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum..."* Illyricum was the area where the former Yugoslavia is located, so through the ministry of the apostle Paul, the gospel had penetrated far into the Roman Empire by the time this letter to the Romans was written.

What can we learn from this passage of Scripture? I think we can learn several things about a Spirit-led ministry. We know that the apostle Paul was spiritual and that he was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. So any principles we see here about the ministry of the apostle Paul, we can apply to Spirit-led ministries today.

Doctrinal Points

1. Characteristics of a Spirit-led ministry:

a. No believer is exempt from exhortation

In verse 14 Paul commended the Roman Christians for their spiritual maturity. The church at Rome was in a healthy spiritual state. Notice, however, what Paul said in verse 15: “*Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points...*” The mature believers at Rome were receiving an exhortation in this letter. No believer is exempt from exhortation.

There are some believers today (and even entire churches) who think that they’re above exhortation. When exhortation is given to these Christians they smugly despise it, along with the preacher or teacher who gives it. A characteristic of a Spirit-led ministry is that no believer is exempt from exhortation.

b. Converts are considered a sacrifice to God

In verse 16 Paul said that he was ministering the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Paul viewed the people that he led to the Lord as sacrifices to God. In fact, the word that’s used here for “ministering the gospel of God” is a word used for the work of a **priest**. How do we view the people that we lead to the Lord? Do we view them as “our converts,” or do we view them as “sacrifice to God”?

Here’s an illustration. For many years we’ve had a Bible study in our home. Some of the believers that I’ve discipled for a number of years have moved on now, and they’re being fed by other ministries. I hope that I’m not jealous! After all, these people are not **my** disciples -- they’re the **Lord’s**! A characteristic of Spirit-led ministries is that converts are considered a sacrifice to **God**.

c. All boasting is Christ-centered

Verses 17-18: “*Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient...*” Note verse 17: “glory to **God**.” Not glory to Paul, but to God! Paul was not reluctant to tell what the Lord was doing through him, but he wanted to be sure that the **Lord** got all the glory! In Galatians 6:14 Paul said, “*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*”

Paul was so concerned about this matter that in verse 18 he said that he was not even going to mention ministries to the Gentiles of other Christian preachers and teachers, lest he risk the possibility of taking credit. In 2 Corinthians 10:16-17 he said “*to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man’s sphere of accomplishment.*”¹⁷ But “*he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*”

How unlike so many Christians today! We love to tell others about what God is doing through us, and so often the emphasis and glory goes to **us** rather than to **God!** Here's a good test to see if you're boasting is Christ-centered and not self-centered: Are you just as proud of what God is doing through other people as what He's doing through you?

Here's an illustration: After I left the engineering profession and before I went to seminary, I worked for a couple of years in the Young Life ministry (a national ministry to high school kids). When I left that ministry I left the work in the hands of a couple of responsible disciples that I had trained, and of course I checked back to see how things were going. Guess what? Things were going great! In fact, things were going even a little better than when I was there! At first I was unsure how to take that! I had kind of thought that things might fall apart a little when I left! I should have been thinking and saying (and I really did think and say), "Praise the Lord!" That ministry was not **mine**, but the **Lord's!** Remember -- a characteristic of Spirit-led ministries is that all boasting is **Christ-centered!**

d. God confirms the ministry with power

In verse 19 Paul said that his preaching was confirmed "*in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...*" We read about these confirming signs and wonders in the Book of Acts. We also read in Hebrews 2:3-4 "*how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?*" We believe that these miraculous signs and wonders were particularly given by God for the early days of Christianity to confirm the Word of the Lord through the apostles before the New Testament Scriptures were completed.

Although the spread of the gospel today is not confirmed to the same degree by the signs and wonders as the signs that occurred in the early church, the gospel is confirmed by **power** today. To see the power of God at work, changing lives because of the gospel, is confirmation of a Spirit-led ministry. You may not have seen many lame people made to walk lately, like the apostle Paul did at Lystra (Acts 14), but you've seen the power of God in changed lives! By the way, those changed lives are not the result of human success or humanistic psychology – they're changed by the power of God! A characteristic of a Spirit-led ministry is that God confirms the ministry with power.

e. The ministry meets a definite need

In verses 20-21 Paul wrote, "*I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand."*

The quote in verse 21 is from the prophecy in Isaiah 52:15, which predicted that the message of the Messiah would go out to the Gentiles. Paul's point about "not building on another man's foundation" was not that such a ministry would be wrong, but that was not the ministry to which God had called Paul. Paul's ministry was to meet the need of taking the gospel to the Gentiles who had not heard.

God doesn't duplicate effort. God is not in the business of wasting spiritual energy. Ministries may overlap, but Spirit-led ministries generally meet a need that other ministries are not meeting. Remember, a characteristic of Spirit-led ministries is that the ministry meets a definite need.

Practical Application

1. Did you ever think of your neighbor as a sacrifice?

"...that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Paul viewed the people that he won to the Lord as a sacrifice to God. Just as the Old Testament sacrifices were to be clean and not defiled, so these "people sacrifices" were to be clean and undefiled. Paul was motivated to present these Gentiles as acceptable and sanctified. His goal was to present them to God as mature believers.

That should be our attitude as well. Did you ever think of your neighbor as a sacrifice? Now when I say "neighbor," it could refer to your literal neighbor, or the person that you work with, or the person that you go to school with --any person that you're witnessing to or discipling.

Let's catch the concept. These people are like sacrifices, and we are like priests bringing these people to the Lord. What kind of sacrifices do you want to see brought to the Lord? Defiled ones? No, of course not! Acceptable and sanctified!

Did you ever think of your neighbor as a sacrifice?