

Apostolic Ministry

Romans 15:14-21

WE come today the beginning of a lengthy farewell from Paul.

He will speak of why he is delayed from his visit to Rome in 22-33.

But before doing so, he first draws back the curtain and explains his ministry.

Paul has full confidence in the Romans, and speaks to them with full boldness, because of the full grace for ministry he received from God, which is about making the Gentiles a full offering to God, by fully preaching the full gospel Christ.

This is part of the Full Foundation of Apostolic Ministry.

The heart of the passage is 16-19 – Paul’s resume, if you will.

But Paul begins with encouraging words in 14-15.

What a little jewel is verse 14! It is linked with 13, that if we are filled with the hope of God and abound in hope by the Holy Spirit, then we should be full of goodness and knowledge and ability to encourage others.

What warmth from the Apostle! Concerning you my brothers! I myself am convinced of these good things about you!

He spoke boldly about weaker and stronger brothers getting along. But this is not because they are deficient!

They were able to admonish each other – so as to instruct, warn, caution, reprove.

In the NT, this word nearly always has a brotherly, or fatherly flavor.

We are able to serve one another, listen to one another, receive instruction from one another, change by one another and assist one another in our differences.

The world in which we live – not so much! But that’s the difference being filled with goodness and of knowledge.

Is that us? Are we full of goodness? Full of knowledge? An intelligent, biblical, kind love?

To have goodness with mindlessness is foolishness, says Proverbs.

To have knowledge without moral and spiritual virtue, well, the devils are such.

So much for our first point – brotherly competence that demonstrates overflowing goodness and knowledge, in communion with God’s people.

Now Paul turns it toward his Apostolic Ministry.

Paul did not plant that church but he is looking for support and assistance.

Peter did not plant that church although Peter preached at Pentecost, which carried the seeds to Rome.

Paul’s ministry is foremost a matter of grace.

In Romans 1, he says he received this ministry from Jesus Christ the risen One. And in verse 16 here, he adds ‘a minister of Christ Jesus’.

And there, in verse 5, he places apostleship and grace as synonyms – we have received grace and apostleship!

Didn’t earn it, didn’t deserve it, didn’t call himself or enter upon this of his own accord.

Apostles are sent with a commission. And that is what we have here. Paul is sent from above, from God, from Jesus who confronted him on the road to Damascus. “He is a chosen vessel to me, and I will send him to the Gentiles.”

And see then that all Christian ministry is built upon this same Apostolic commission. All true ministers are called of God, by grace. It is not of man, as Paul told the Galatians. And it is only true Christian ministry as it is in line with the Apostles and Christ.

Now Paul speaks about the *manner* of his ministry in verse 16.

Rarely does the NT use priestly terms of the ministry. And that for good reason. The office of priest in the OT has been fulfilled. There are no high priests anymore once Jesus has died.

Now that the fullness has come, there is no central temple worship on earth. Jesus is the only and exclusive high priest over the church. And the church is the temple of believers, as we all are made a kingdom of priests unto our heavenly Father by Christ.

Paul then sees his ministry in this profound way. He is taking deeply depraved and often idolatrous Gentiles, and by the simple Gospel, sees them transformed into living stones of the temple of God, living sacrifices in their bodies, offering up spiritual worship – Romans 12:1-2.

His ministry is by this gospel all of grace to so consecrate them, devote them as a whole fiery offering of worship, love, holiness and obedience to the Lord, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel Ministry is not just about getting us saved. It does that. But it must be understood that

1. The gospel is not only the righteousness of God to forgive but the power of God to regenerate.
2. And Jesus is not just our justification but our sanctification.

When a believer is saved, he or she is made a new, heavenly creature, as well as pardoned for the sake of Christ!

You now stand out of this world; you stand before your Father in heaven.

Did I say stand? You are seated above in safety.

And why? So that you may live a happy and prosperous life here below and ignore heavenly things! That's the health and wealth gospel! And how small and weak it is in contrast to this true!

Paul glories – boasts in this – longs to get this rich truth across to the church at Rome!

He sees Jesus has come, has fulfilled his sufferings according to the Scriptures, and now bodily and rules and reigns over all from above!

All the earth has been given to Him to do with as He pleases, as Ps 2 and 16 and 45 and 72 and 110 and 118 say!

Paul is a minister to act in a priestly way, not a priest to act in a ministerial way.

He serves a gospel altar – a portal into worship above.

He leads the nations into obedience, or, as later, the obedience of faith, faith in the gospel.

His boasting is not in himself but in God, in the things that pertain to God.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Cor 3)

So this is the *manner* of Apostolic Ministry.

Now a word on the *means* of Apostolic Ministry.

Notice that it is the work of God from first to last. It is the work of the gospel of His Son, the work of the Holy Spirit.

But what means, what instrument does Paul use in bringing about the obedience of the Gentiles by faith in the gospel?

Well, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, and how shall they hear unless someone is sent to declare the Word and preach!

The power of preaching is central to Paul ministering as a priest to present the bride to the groom above!

Paul is preaching not a mere hope so but that all who come will be saved, be forgiven, be changed for glory, be acceptable to God, be sanctified by the Holy Spirit – on account of his gospel!

He has fully preached the gospel of Christ – 19.

What is it for Paul to preach fully the gospel? Well, that means preaching with signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit, and reaching all lands, all places. Apostolic signs accompanied apostolic ministry. Paul says the Gentiles are made obedient by both word and deed, in verse 18.

These signs and wonders were real works of God's hand accompanying the preaching of the Apostle.

Do we not need them today? The answer is that God has never uniformly given miracles to the church.

We know signs and wonders serve a supporting role to the message and messengers sent by God – else why does Paul call them ‘signs of an apostle’?

But these signs and wonders clearly had a foundational function. They established that foundation of the gospel going into the world.

So we believe in tongues, prophecy, miraculous healings as a sign – but we believe them as they have been placed in the foundation.

Once the gospel revelation had been given, the reason for these signs and wonders was fulfilled.

Are we having new revelation today? Is God adding books to the Bible? No. Do we believe in these signs? – yes, by extension, as confirming this book which is now complete.

If the Lord wanted to give these today, he would. Nothing is too hard for him. But the days of the Apostles, like those of Moses, had this banner: “We cannot but prophecy! We cannot but heal! We cannot but speak in tongues and bring special revelation!”

It seems the modern charismatic movement is missing all of this. You have to drum up tongues speaking, you have to have special circumstances for healings to take place, and you have to redefine prophecy in order to make sense of their messages.

Even unbelievers can see through what is only a charade to make money.

We have the Last Word from God the Word, come in the flesh. Visions and prophecy have been sealed up with the advent of Christ.

But we live in the light of these powerful works of God, do we not? Did not Israel in the OT see themselves as having passed through the Red Sea in miraculous deliverance?

So we can say that these Pentecostal gifts are ours. The wonderful healings of Jesus in the gospels and the signs of the apostles are ours to rejoice in as the foundation of our faith still.

This brings us to the fitting *goal* or *object* of such a full gospel with full preaching. That all the world might hear. Paul aspires to preach where they have not heard, like far off Spain.

He is not demeaning labors in established churches; not at all. There is much to do to make Gentiles obedient in both word and deed.

Paul preached in Jerusalem and as far off as Illyricum. I find that striking, because Luke tells us nothing in Acts of his preaching in Illyricum.

Paul was called to this work in unplowed fields – in fulfillment of Isaiah 53.

But there is more here. Paul knows and feels something that is missing too much in the church today. That the gospel is for the whole wide world.

I recall one of my professors saying the church has never been able to live up to the great commission. In other words, the world has been too great for her. But Paul seems to say the world is too small and no match for the gospel.

Paul's idea of reaching the Gentiles is summarized by planting gospel preaching churches. He is not talking about getting to every hut and house, every soul and name. But do we have a gospel, do we have a

ministry, do we have a word of life for this whole dying planet?

And are you stirred by what this world would be by this gospel? That the nations would be a sweet smelling aroma of worship to the Father!

Oh what a good work you share in – sharing in the ministry – praying and supporting the work of the gospel!

We pray that the name of our God and Father would be hallowed, set apart, honored! Let us do all to lift him up in Christ! Let us pray and work toward this highest of all goals! Let this be our glory, our boast, in Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to us, and we to the world!