

Paul's Apostolic Ministry

Text: Romans 15:14-33

Introduction:

1. The Apostle Paul wraps up his exhortation on church unity by reminding his readers again of God's plan for the unity of both Jew and Gentile in Christ (Vs. 8-13), supporting his argument with numerous quotations from the O.T.
2. The tone of the Epistle now transitions from his formal, theological treatise on the doctrine of salvation to his concluding remarks of a more personal nature.
3. In these verses, Paul speaks again of his apostolic calling and his desire to see the church at Rome. He essentially returns to the same thoughts he expressed in the opening of the Epistle (1:5-16)
4. We will note four qualities of the Apostle's ministry outlined in these verses:

I. The Position of his Ministry (Vs. 14-16)

A. The Authority of his apostleship (Vs. 14-15)

1. Paul expresses confidence in the spiritual strengths of the church at Rome and in so doing, tempers to a degree the firm language he has just employed in dealing with the issue of church unity (Vs. 14).
2. Paul at the same time reasserts his apostolic prerogative to address the church at Rome by virtue of his Divine calling (Vs. 15). The fact that Paul had not directly planted the church of Rome.

B. The Appointment to his apostleship (Vs. 16a)

1. He was Divinely called to this ministry
 - a. "because of the grace that is given to me of God" = Paul was an Apostle by the grace of God. This is a reference, not to grace in general but specific grace given for his appointment as an Apostle (See 1:5)
2. "minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" = Paul was Christ's servant to the Gentiles. Rom. 1:1 "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God."
3. "ministering the gospel of God" = Paul was a servant of the Gospel. He served his Gentile mission field by taking them the good news, the Gospel!

C. The Aim of his apostleship (Vs. 16b)

1. 'that' = reveals the purpose of his Gospel ministry
2. "offering up of the Gentiles" = Paul employs the language of the altar. He views the Gentile converts as being offered up to God as a sweet-smelling offering. This offering of the Gentiles is acceptable to God as they have been set apart through the work of the Holy Spirit.
3. Paul's consuming passion and focus was to preach the Gospel to

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the Gentiles and see them matured in Christ. Col 1:27-29 *“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”*

II. The Power of his Ministry (Vs. 17-22)

A. The Origin of this Power (Vs. 17-18a)

1. “I may glory” = ‘glory’ means to rejoice or boast in something. The following words make it clear that Paul was not glorying in self or anything his own strength had accomplished but he rejoiced in what God had accomplished through him.
2. “things which pertain to God” = Paul’s ministry achievements were through the mighty power of God
 - a. Vs. 15 “the grace that is given to me of God”
 - b. “Vs. 16 “being sanctified by the Holy Ghost”
 - c. Vs. 19 “by the power of the Spirit of God”
3. Vs. 18a – Paul would only speak of what Christ had done through him. “Paul further justifies his “boasting”. Paul would not speak of anything other than what Christ accomplished through him. What Paul earlier alluded to – “grace given to me of God,” “sanctified by the Holy Ghost” – he now makes clear: the success of his ministry is due entirely to Divine enablement. Christ is the active “worker” in the things of which Paul is speaking: Paul is simply the instrument.” (Moo)

B. The Operation of this power (Vs. 18b-19)

1. Power to Save (Vs. 18b-19a)
 - a. “to make the Gentiles obedient” = only God’s power can transform sinful, stubborn and rebellious hearts into hearts that are submissive to the will of God. Salvation involves submission and surrender to God. The sinner must ‘obey’ God’s command to repent and believe (Mark 1:15; Acts 17:30).
 - i. 2 Thess. 1:8 *“In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that **obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ:”*
 - ii. Acts 5:32 *“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given **to them that obey him.**”*
 - iii. Heb. 5:9 *“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them **that obey him;**”*
 - b. “by word and deed” = summary of Paul’s ministry activities
 - i. The miracles – “signs and wonders” A unique aspect of the office of an Apostle prior to the completion of the N.T. canon. 2 Cor. 12:12 *“Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.”*
 - ii. The Message – “the Gospel of Christ”

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2. Power to Serve (Vs. 19b-22)
 - a. “Jerusalem to Illyricum” – a large territory in a day without the conveniences of modern travel.
 - b. “fully preached” = Paul was able to fulfil his God given calling to preach the Gospel in those areas and establish churches that would continue the work of spreading the Gospel
 - c. Vs. 20-21 – Paul further details the focus of his Gospel preaching ministry. His ministry was that of the pioneer and church planter. His calling was to break new ground for the Gospel, to take the Gospel to those who had never heard. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15 in Vs. 21 in support of this approach.

III. The Plan for his Ministry (Vs. 23-29)

A. His Desire to visit Rome (Vs. 23-24)

1. Paul’s plan was to go to Spain to open new territory for the Gospel. On his way to Spain, he hoped to visit the church at Rome.
2. There were several reasons for this desire:
 - a. To equip the saints (1:11)
 - b. To raise support – “to be brought on my way thitherward by you” ‘thitherward’ is an old English word that means “toward that place”. Paul obviously hoped that the church at Rome would participate in assisting him materially in order to reach the mission field of Spain. Local, New Testament churches are God’s mission bases for the accomplishment of the Great Commission; not para church organisations!
 - c. To fellowship and be refreshed – “if first I be somewhat filled with your company” (See also 1:12 & Vs. 32)

B. His Duty to visit Jerusalem (Vs. 25-29)

1. Paul was going to Jerusalem to deliver an offering to support the poor, Jewish saints. This offering had been given by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Vs. 25-26) (Read also 2 Cor. 8-9)
2. Paul then explains the appropriateness of this offering. The Gentiles had shared in the blessings of the Jewish Gospel and it was therefore fitting that they minister of their substance in return. (Vs. 27) “carnal things” = material needs
3. Having explained the reason for his visit to Jerusalem, Paul reiterates his promise to visit Rome, expressing confidence that he will come equipped of God to minister the Gospel (Vs. 28-29)

IV. The Plea for his Ministry (Vs. 30-33)

A. The Motivation for Prayer (Vs. 30)

1. “I beseech you” = strong entreaty. Paul says in effect, “I beg you”. He keenly sensed his need of the prayer support of God’s people.
2. “for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake” = Christ is the focus of prayer. Our prayers for God’s servants are ultimately offered out of a motivation for the cause of Christ.
3. “love of the Spirit” = the love that comes from the Spirit of God and is shed abroad in our hearts, motivating us to pray for one another.

B. The Exertion in Prayer (Vs. 30b)

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1. “strive together with me” = to wrestle, struggle and agonize; to engage in conflict. Word was used in classical Greek as an athletic term, describing the concerted action of a team of athletes in the Greek games. It meant to contend along with, to share in a contest. Paul asks the Roman saints to contend with him in prayer against the opposition of the hosts of wickedness. (Wuest)
2. Intercession is hard work because we enter the realm of spiritual warfare and begin to feel the weight and heavy burden of the battles taking place in the heavenlies. No wonder many Christians are not interested in serious prayer! It requires too much effort and they would rather sit back a safe distance from the battle and enjoy their comfort and ease.

C. The Petitions for Prayer (Vs. 31-33)

1. The petitions for Paul (Vs. 31-32)

Paul outlines three specific prayer requests, each introduced by the word ‘that’:

 - a. Prayer for protection (31a). There are many enemies pitted against a God-called, God-anointed minister of the Gospel. 1 Cor. 16:9 *“For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are **many adversaries.**”* 2 Thess. 3:1-2 *“Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord might have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: **And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all me have not faith.**”*
 - b. Prayer for the believer’s reception of him and the gift (31b). Opposition to Paul was not confined to the unbelieving Jews. It came from inside the Jewish church as well which had a tendency to be steeped in prejudice against the Gentile believers.
 - c. Prayer for an open door to visit Rome (Vs. 32)
2. A petition by Paul (Vs. 33)
 - a. Paul ends this section with a prayer that the believers in Rome will know the presence of God.
 - b. God is described as “the God of peace”.

Conclusion:

1. Are we living in the strength of self or in the power of the Spirit? Is it Christ living and working through us (Gal. 2:20)?
2. Are we passionate about reaching the unreached with the message of salvation?
3. Are we participating in the spiritual battle in the place of prayer?