

THE CONCERNS OF A TRUE MINISTER Romans 15:14-33

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You may not have realized it, but we finished the book of Romans with our last lesson as far as doctrine is concerned. The Apostle Paul adds a postscript to his letter beginning with verse 14 of chapter 15. From the beginning verses of the book until Romans 15:13, Paul has been dealing primarily with doctrine — this is the greatest doctrinal book ever written. Although Paul was a man of doctrine, he was also a man of emotion. He had a heart as well as a head.

The section we deal with in this lesson is autobiographical, and in it Paul reveals the inner workings of a faithful minister of Jesus Christ. While it deals primarily with those who are called into full-time Christian service, it is applicable to every Christian because, in one sense, all Christians are ministers of Jesus Christ. The ministry is not for some class called “clergy” who wear their collars backwards or don long robes; the ministry is something every Christian should participate in.

PAUL’S CONCERN FOR THE FEELINGS OF THE SAINTS — Romans 15:14-16

Looking at these verses phrase by phrase:

“And I myself also am persuaded (satisfied) of you, my brethren” — Paul realized that most of the Roman Christians were spiritually healthy. He did not know any of them personally but he had heard of them and they passed his examination, (To have the Apostle Paul say, “I am satisfied with your spiritual condition,” was quite an honor, both at that time and in retrospect.)

“That ye also are full of goodness” — Their hearts were right. It was not that they were basically good or perfect, but Paul could sense that the motives of their hearts were true. They went to church because they loved Christ, not to impress people. They witnessed for Christ, not out of fear, but out of love.

“Filled with all knowledge” — Their heads were right. This does not mean that they knew all things but that they acted intelligently — they acted from knowledge. They were not tossed about by every wind of doctrine. They had an intelligent comprehension of God’s will and Word and acted with purpose and power. Never say doctrine is not important. It is difficult to live by truth we do not know!

“Able also to admonish (instruct) one another” — They were beginning to show signs of real maturity. They were not only growing themselves, but were also able to help others grow in the Lord. A lack of maturity is one of the problems of the church in America. Most of us suffer from what someone has described as “prolonged adolescence merging into premature senility.” We never grow up spiritually.

“Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God” — No matter how great their spiritual maturity, these Romans needed to be reminded about God and his will.

“That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God” — These Romans had to be reminded that Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles and his job was to teach and preach the gospel.

“That the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.” — Paul looked upon his apostleship as a high priest who offers up saved Gentiles to God as an offering. his one goal was to see Gentiles saved and built up in the faith. his work was set apart (sanctified) by the Holy Spirit. Apparently there may be Christian work in the flesh that is not satisfying to God.

PAUL’S CONCERN OVER PRIDE IN THE MINISTRY — Romans 15:17-19

“I have therefore whereof I may glory (boast) through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God” — Paul had many attainments in the power of Christ in which he could boast. God had used him in a wonderful way.

“For I will not dare to speak of any of those things wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed” — Apparently Paul had done things that were not in the power of Christ to reach the Gentiles, but he is not going to talk about them for only Christ’s attainments through him, as an instrument, were worth talking about. True humility is realizing what we are in Christ and giving God all the glory for it.

“For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain: but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (I Cor. 15:9, 10).

Speaking of pride and ministry, in my time, I’ve seen that there are four basic reasons that people leave vocational work in the church:

- (1) Pride
- (2) Materialism
- (3) Sexually promiscuity

(4) A nagging or unspiritual spouse.

Paul's own pride is a concern to him because he knows it can destroy his ministry more quickly than the more obvious sins of the flesh.

Continuing with the passage: "Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have preached the gospel of Christ" — By Christ, through the power of the Spirit, Paul preached the gospel. He had a burden for evangelism and knew that the gospel alone could save men from sin and hell. Throbbing in his heart was a passion and yearning to reach all men everywhere with the truth of Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote earlier, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth: . . ." (Rom. 1:16) and "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (I Cor. 9:16).

Where are the men who will stand true to the gospel now? Today our churches are corrupted with back-slappers, men pleasers and compromisers.

PAUL'S CONCERN FOR OTHER MINISTERS — Romans 15:20, 21

"Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand" — Paul was a pioneer missionary and a church starter. He laid foundations and let others do the building of the saints. He did not have the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher, but was an evangelist and a teacher. He would never build on another man's foundation.

There is no place for petty jealousies among true ministers of God. Each has his gift and each is important to the Church. Paul made that clear in his letter to Corinth: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (I Cor. 3:6-8, KJV).

PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THE SAINTS' SOULS — Romans 15:22-24

"For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you" — The apostle longed to come to see these Christians in Rome; apparently, he had never met them. He was hindered, not by the devil, but by the burden of the ministry. This was a hindrance that was a blessing. Paul had many personal wants and desires, but God's plan for his life overruled them.

“But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you“ — Paul had preached in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, and people had been won to Christ and churches established, but there was a desire to go on and on with the gospel to places where it had not been preached. He was faithful to the Lord’s command, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Christ’s command is, “Go and preach.” How we should weep over our departure from the spirit of Christ and the Apostles in this matter of taking the message to the lost. We set up beautiful church buildings and say, “Why don’t the unsaved come to church?” A better question is, “Why should the unsaved come to church?” God never told the unsaved masses to come to church (although the church door is open to them) but he told the Christian to take the gospel to the unsaved masses. (Let us cease chiding men for failing to come to hear the gospel instead of our obeying the Lord and going with it to them where they are!)

“Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company” — Paul seemed certain that he would get to Spain and would stop by Rome to see the Christians there. He did get to Rome, by the will of God, but it was not as he thought it would be at all. He went to Rome in chains as a prisoner of the state. Someone has said, “Man proposes, but God disposes!” God’s ways are not our ways.

PAUL’S CONCERN FOR THE SAINTS’ BODIES — Romans 15:25-29

“But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints” — The saints in Jerusalem were in such terrible straits because of famine and persecution that Paul felt obligated to take up a collection for them from the Gentile churches. He had been warned by the Holy Spirit not to go to Jerusalem, but he loved the Jewish saints and was concerned for their physical welfare.

“For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.” — The Gentile Christians felt a burden for their Jewish brethren in Christ and set out to meet their needs. What better way to heal the rift between Jew and Gentile Christians than for converted Gentiles to help hungry Jewish Christians?

The Bible teaches that Christians are to take care of the needy among them before they help the world about them. Notice in the Old Testament — a complex web of social support was required to exist to help poor Jews (though it was rarely practiced.) But no commands exist to go into other nations and aid their impoverished. The New Testament clarifies this silence by saying in Galatians 6:10, “So then, while we

have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (NASB).

“It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.” — The Gentiles owed a debt to the Jews for the gospel came to them through the Jews. Without the Jews, the world would never have had the Bible or the gospel.

The Gentile churches that were aided soon became self-supporting. This is a good general principle for foreign missions: churches are generally not to ask for support, but they are to give it.

“When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain.” — Paul planned to take the money, an obvious fruit of his Gentile work, and personally deliver it to Jerusalem and have it receipted (sealed). Paul was businesslike in financial matters and he was clearly concerned with ethics.

“And I am sure that when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessings of the gospel.” — Paul is confident that he will be fully accepted when he arrives in Rome.

PAUL’S CONCERN FOR HIS OWN LIFE — Romans 15:30, 31

“Now I beseech (beg) you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” — Paul requested prayer for himself personally, for he had great needs. He needed to walk close to Christ and he feared for his life as he went to Jerusalem. The word “strive” is a military word and means “to agonize.” It takes time and hard work to pray. Effort must be put into it. Prayer is a mystery. God has a plan that will come to pass, but prayer actually changes things. Jesus said, “Men ought always to pray and not to faint.” Someone else said, “Prayer works, prayer is work, and prayer leads to work.”

“That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea” — Paul, being a normal human being, had some fears about going to Jerusalem. He believed that prayers would play a part in God’s protection of him. With this example, we can find encouragement to pray for missions and missionaries even though we do not know all the details of their various situations.

There is a story about Dr. H. A. Ironside’s going once or twice a year to preach the gospel to a little French colony somewhere in Idaho. These people lived in the backwoods on an island and the only way to get to them was by rowboat. He would ride

his horse to the river and then yell across in French, "Please bring the boat." Then he would stay with them several days preaching and teaching.

Before he left the colony one day, he asked the French people to pray for him in his travels. They replied, "We don't believe that prayer is necessary, for we believe God is sovereign and He has promised to meet our needs. We just believe his Word."

Dr. Ironside asked them, "Haven't you noticed that the Apostle Paul asked people to pray for him?" "Yes," they said, "We know this, but perhaps Paul didn't understand all the truth on this matter." (There are many who think they know more theology than the Apostle Paul.)

Dr. Ironside went on his way to Minneapolis and there he contracted a terrible sickness, almost to the point of death, but he recovered. After a few months he went back to the French colony in Idaho. The people who met him with the boat said, "When we heard you were sick, do you know what we did? We remembered you had asked us to pray for you, so we gathered our people together and had prayer for you."

Dr. Ironside answered, "Well, thank you, but do you know, if you had prayed for me first, I might never have been sick!" It's hard to know the precise hand of God in matters like this, but Dr. Ironside made his point with those who thought they knew more than Paul about prayer and God's sovereignty.

"And that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints" — Paul was also concerned that the saints in Jerusalem might not accept the gift from the saved Gentiles. Why? Because of pride and prejudice. You have surely learned that it takes more grace to be a good receiver than it does to be a good giver.

PAUL'S CONCERN FOR HIS FAITHFULNESS — Romans 15:32, 33

"That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed" — Paul's plan was to stop at Rome and be refreshed on his way to Spain to preach the gospel. While we cannot be sure, all evidence indicated that Paul did get to Spain.

Paul's joy could only be filled as he was faithful in his ministry — not fruitful, but faithful! "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). At the end of Paul's life he could say that he had finished his course. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

"Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen" — Paul prayed a short prayer, assuring them that only the God of peace could quiet their hearts over his welfare. This

same God of peace comforted Paul in tragedy, prison, beatings, mocking, shipwrecks, as he faithfully took the gospel to the then known world.

CONCLUSION

Paul gave his life to the preaching of the gospel. Why would anyone do such a thing? Because the “gospel is the power of God unto salvation.”

What is the gospel? The bad (negative) news of the gospel is that all men are sinners, separated from God spiritually because of their sin and rebellion, and that all are headed for eternal judgment because they are under God’s wrath. The good news (positive) of the gospel is that Christ died for sinners and rose from the grave on the third day to declare the elect righteous before God. For a person to become a Christian, he must respond to the call of God by acknowledging Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior from sin. When a person is converted, he receives the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and Christ takes the throne of his life, not only to assure him of his eternal destiny, but also to enable him to live in obedience.

What must you do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!