

Romans 15:14-21 "Serve in The Strength Which God Supplies"

This letter, that Paul has addressed to the Christians in Rome, is about to come to an end. Paul has given these Christians some very weighty things to consider as the Holy Spirit has inspired the apostle to instruct and encourage the body of Christ.

All of what Paul writes has been aimed at the hearts of these Christians so that they will consider what their salvation is all about and that their lives will be conformed into the image of Christ by the working of the Spirit.

He hasn't pulled any punches and yet he wants them to know that he's on their side and loves them enough to give them the truth. But he knows they love the truth and they love their Lord and Savior.

This, by the way, makes the ministry of a Pastor or teacher a rewarding one; knowing that even when hard things have to be said, those who are being instructed are open and teachable to the truth because they want to grow.

This isn't always the case in the Body of Christ in the world. And it wasn't always the case with Paul. In fact, when he wrote to the Galatian Christians he reminds them how they used to love him and desire to grow as they embraced the truths of God's word.

And yet in their flesh they began to move away from the truth because of worldly influences, and in the process they moved away from the ministry of Paul as he brought them the truth.

Gal 4:16 "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" They didn't like what he had to say and so they moved away from him and the truth he brought them from God's word.

Sometimes people don't want to hear the truth, but we never want to concede to that attitude by giving people simply what they want to hear, instead of loving them enough by giving the truth without compromise and in the love of Christ.

When Paul was instructing Timothy in his ministry he reminded Timothy of this very thing.

2Ti 4:3-4 "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching

ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."

This has always been a danger in the church. And this is one reason the church has been infiltrated with so many teachings of the world. Instead of adhering to sound doctrine or teaching according to God's word, there have been those who want their ears tickled with a lot of fluff which has no substance and cannot sustain them for very long.

Jesus prayed to the Father in Joh 17:17 "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

Paul delighted in the Christians at Rome because their attitude was to grow in the truth and so he says in Rom 15:14 "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another."

In other words, they had a zeal for Christ and their lives demonstrated it with a virtue or excellence which strove to honor their Lord. But their desire to honor Christ was never separated from their love for the truth of God's word.

They were full of goodness or virtue, but they were also filled with all knowledge as Paul recognizes in verse 14. By this he means a personal knowledge of God and His word and a knowledge which wasn't limited to a head knowledge, but a knowledge which was in the heart as well, which directed their lives God-ward.

He commends them for this because they were taking this goodness and knowledge and using it to minister to one another in a way which always pointed each other to Christ. As our text says, "competent to instruct one another."

The NAS and the KJV puts it, "able also to admonish one another." The idea here is that each Christian should be equipped in the truth and love of Christ to the degree that they can minister to one another according to God's truth.

That doesn't mean that we all have to be Theologians with a Divinity degree. It simply means we should all be striving to know Christ better. And there's no better way to get to know Jesus than to know what He says to us in His word and then walk in that truth by the power of the Spirit.

And as we're encouraging each other to look to Christ then we'll be accomplishing the task to build each other up. And isn't that what

Paul just got through telling us in Rom.14:19 ... "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

Now, we might be tempted to think that when we have everything going in the right direction, and we're pursuing the truth of God's word and encouraging each other in Christ, that we can just cruise and put life on auto-pilot.

No, this just isn't the case. In fact, it's when we're being faithful to Christ that the enemy will often try to upset our walk with the Lord. He just hates it when Christians get serious with their Savior.

But, it's precisely because of this that Paul wants to remind these Christians in Rome to stand firm and not to rest on their laurels.

Rom 15:15 "I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again..."

It's not as though they weren't abiding in Christ and walking in His word, but Paul wants to constantly remind them of these things so that they don't become too familiar and so lose the cutting edge of walking close with Christ.

The apostle Peter understood this.

2Pe 1:12-15 "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things."

The apostle John also; 1Jo 2:21 "I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth."

When we learn the truth of God's word, it's not as though we never need to be reminded of those truths. 'Been there, did that, know this.'

It's when we dwell on God's word and are constantly reminded of His love and salvation that we have a desire to grow in our salvation. And that growth is always united to the truth. That's why I spend so much time teaching the word of God.

And I believe that's why the Holy Spirit has done such a neat work in your lives as you are growing in Christ. There may be growing pains in this walk, but I see real advancements in your faith and in your desire to build each other up in Christ, because you love the truth of God's word.

Remember Christ's words... "Father sanctify them in Your truth. Your word is truth."

And so like Peter I say, "I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have."

Getting back to our text. Paul wants to remind these Christians, not only of what they already know, but also to remind them of God's grace extended to them as He has chosen Paul to be a special minister unto them.

Rom 15:15-16 "I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with 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."

Paul realizes that he has been quite bold in some of what he had to say to these Christians. He doesn't apologize for that, but he is sensitive to the fact that he did not plant that church in Rome, and so he reminds them that he can speak with this authority because of the grace that God gave him to be an apostle to the Gentiles, which the Romans were, by and large.

In other words, Paul isn't some lone ranger writing letters to churches all over the world in which he had no hand in starting. It might be like a Pastor in Flint, Michigan writing a letter to this church and giving certain instructions for us to follow.

Some might say, who is this guy that he should have anything to do with us and tell us anything? And this is what some Christians thought of Paul. But Paul was not some Pastor who had a fetish for writing letters.

Paul was called by Jesus Christ Himself to be an Apostle to the Gentiles, a special position which God used to give the church the very word of God which included the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rom 15:16 "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with 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."

This is symbolic language using O.T. imagery to explain the working of God in the lives of these people. Paul is seen as a sort of O.T. Priest who is offering the Gentiles up to God as a type of sacrifice.

In the O.T. the priests were responsible to come into the very presence of God as they obeyed God by bringing sacrifices on behalf of the people, which pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins.

But here Paul uses O.T. imagery to drive home the point that he has been called by God and that he is personally responsible to stand before God as His representative before the Gentiles.

Now, before you get the idea that Paul's priestly function to minister to the Gentiles was exclusive to him, keep in mind that we've all been called to minister unto our Lord as He sees fit to use us.

This is why the Scriptures speak of the priesthood of all believers. We all stand personally before our God and are responsible to minister unto Him and to give back to Him what He is doing in and through us.

1Pe 2:4-5,9 "As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Our priestly function, like Paul's, is to stand before our God and say Lord, 'I belong to You. How may I minister to You and to Your Body, the church?' That's all Paul did. He was called out by God and was willing to do the work. He didn't ask to be an apostle, he simply obeyed when he was called by Christ.

But in our text Paul is also saying that the Gentiles are an "offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." In other words, Paul can say with confidence that the field God has given him he

can give back to God and say, 'see Lord I have been faithful with what you've entrusted to me and I give back to You what belongs to You and what You have sanctified by Your Holy Spirit.'

This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus when he spoke of the Kingdom of God and compared it to a man going on a journey.

Mat 25:14-15,19-21 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents [A talent was worth more than a thousand dollars in silver.] of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' 21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

God gives everyone of His people the responsibility to be His minister and He desires for us to be faithful with what He gives us, not the least of which is His gospel of hope found in Jesus Christ.

But it's not as though He sends us out with no resources or without the power we need to accomplish His will. And that's why Paul adds at the end of verse 16... "sanctified by the Holy Spirit." It is the Spirit of God who accomplishes His will in our lives as we submit to Him and to His power.

The word sanctified means: to make holy; purify; consecrate. The idea is that in God calling us out, He has called us out for a consecrated purpose to His glory. And Paul is simply recognizing that his work to bring the gospel to the Gentiles has as its end to bring a people to God so that God may use them to be sanctified or set apart for a special work.

And who is doing this sanctifying work? Paul makes it very clear that the Holy Spirit is doing this work. And how in part is this sanctifying process accomplished? Again, I give you Jesus' words in Joh.17:17 "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

It is the Holy Spirit who has inspired the Word of God. If we are to walk in the Spirit we must humble ourselves before the Spirit who has given us His word so that we may grow in respect to our salvation.

Paul saw how the Holy Spirit enabled him to do his work as unto the Lord and so he naturally gives God the glory.

Rom 15:17 "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God."

The NAS puts it, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God."

By this Paul means that he will not boast in himself, but will boast in Christ who has worked through such a vessel as himself.

He puts it another way when writing to the Corinthians.

2Co 10:17-18 "But, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." [Jer. 9:24] 18 For it is not the one who commands himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commands."

And so for that reason Paul doesn't want to take credit for what only the Holy Spirit can do in a person's heart, and he doesn't want to take credit for what another man has done as unto the Lord.

Rom 15:18-21 "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done-- 19 by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 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. 21 Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." [Isaiah 52:15]

Paul says, "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done--"

Paul fully understood that the work of God is something only God could do. He may use instruments like you and me, but it is God who turns the heart of a person, it is God who opens the eyes of the blind so they may see their salvation in Christ. It is God who gives life eternal.

Our part is to obey and follow and glory in His work as we receive the great privilege of participating in that work. It's not a work we can take credit for and should not take credit for.

Charles Hodge put it this way in regards to Paul's ministry. "The conversion of the Gentiles was Christ's work, not Paul's; and therefore Paul could glory in it without self-exaltation."

He goes on to say, "It was not only by the truth as presented in the word, but also by the effectual inward operation of His power, that Christ converted men to the faith."

You and I don't convert anybody. We are simply the instruments through which God has decided to work, and through which the gospel goes out as we are faithful to be those witnesses called out by God to His glory.

And as we are faithful to our calling, we will see, as did Paul, that God will bring many unto Himself. Paul speaks of his own experience as the Lord used him to demonstrate to the world that he was an apostle called by God as God accompanied his ministry with miraculous signs.

Rom 15:19 "by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ."

These signs and miracles Paul attests to are signs and miracles which the Holy Spirit was accomplishing through Paul. It wasn't as though Paul had some inherent power. What he possessed was a gift which was to be given freely to others.

He didn't charge for healings, he didn't use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to gather great crowds together to witness miracles and then encourage the crowds to get out their Visa and Master Cards to contribute to his ministry.

The Holy Spirit used Paul in this way to demonstrate the power of God, not the power of Paul. In fact, it was demonstrated that the sign of a true apostle was that the Holy Spirit gifted that man with signs and miracles, not to bring attention to the apostle, but so that the gospel would go out and be validated through that apostle's ministry in such a powerful way.

2Co 12:12 "The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance."

Signs, wonders and miracles are still happening in the Body of Christ today as the Holy Spirit gifts people, but unfortunately the signs, wonders and miracles are often bringing more attention to

the one who claims to be gifted rather than to the One who gives the gifts.

Since I just taught on the gifts of the Holy Spirit just a few weeks ago I won't comment on how these gifts are to be used in the Body of Christ today, but I would say that we must be discerning, for we are told that in the last days that there will be false signs and wonders and miracles performed by the enemy.

We must be careful not to measure the success of a ministry simply by the amount of signs and wonders, but by the way Jesus Christ is exalted and by the desire to reach the lost with the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation.

This was Paul's motivation; not the miraculous for the sake of the miraculous, but to see people saved from the penalty of their sins as they embrace the Messiah by faith.

Rom 15:20-21 "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. 21 Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

His ambition? To preach the gospel. But for Paul it wasn't as though he would go into a town and put on an evangelistic crusade in an existing church. It's not that that is inappropriate as the Spirit leads, but Paul wanted to find out where no one had been with the gospel and go there.

He didn't want to be accused of building on someone else's foundation. In other words, he didn't want to make it look like he was taking advantage of someone else's labor in Christ.

Even if he did go to an existing churched area he wouldn't have been taking advantage of anybody, but his ministry, as an apostle to the Gentiles, was intended by God to reach the known world with the Gospel.

And so, Paul was happy that others were reaching out to the lost. But because he felt an urgency to reach everyone, he didn't want to retrace the steps of someone else who was doing God's work. He was content to go some place where no evangelist had been.

That's why he was always on the move. You look at the four separate journeys of Paul which included his trip to Rome under Roman arrest, and you'll see that when he wasn't planting a new

church he was spending time with those new churches instructing them in the word so they could grow in their faith, so they in turn go out and spread the gospel.

The particulars of Paul's ministry may not be what God has called you and me to, but there is one thing which is identical to all ministries in Christ and that is to be His witness.

In fact, that's the very reason Jesus Baptizes or fills us with His Spirit.

Act 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

If we're simply willing to be His witness the Holy Spirit will not only enable us to accomplish that, but He will also make clear the particular path He wants us to go.

For me He has called me to be a Pastor and equip and feed His sheep. For you it may be any number of areas of ministry, from the children, to teaching adults, to reaching out to the prisoners or any area where needs must be met.

Seek God earnestly and He will make your path straight. Rely on the power of His Spirit and He will enable to walk in His ways. And hopefully, like Paul we'll be able to say, "But, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." [2Co 10:17]

Give Him all the glory and be ever thankful for the salvation you have in Christ.