

FBC POWELL, 10-28-18 PM
"A Church Strategy That Pleases God"
Romans 15:14-21
World Missions Celebration 2018

"A church's success is better measured by its sending capacity than its seating capacity,"

"The theme of God's heart for people groups and nations runs from Genesis to Revelation. God has made it clear in His word that He intends to bring the blessings of His salvation to every people group on earth (Genesis 12:11-3, Psalm 66, Isaiah 49:6, Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:45-47, Acts 1:8, Romans 14:20-21, Revelation 5:9, and Revelation 7:9-10, among many others)."
—*Foundations*, The International Mission Board

Revelation 5:9 (NASB) "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.'"

I. God Is Pleas'd with a Strategy to Mature the Members (v. 14)

- A. Mature Members Are Filled with Goodness (v. 14a)
- B. Mature Members Are Filled with Knowledge (v. 14b)
- C. Mature Members Are Able to Admonish One Another (v. 14c)

Romans 15:14 (WNT) "As far as I am concerned about you, my brothers, I am convinced that you especially are abounding in the highest goodness, richly supplied with perfect knowledge and competent to counsel one another."

II. God Is Pleas'd with a Strategy to Minister the Gospel of God (vv. 15-16)

III. God Is Pleas'd with a Strategy to Magnify the Glory of God (vv. 17-19)

2 Corinthians 10:17 (NASB) "But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord."

IV. God Is Pleas'd With a Strategy for Missions to the Unreached (vv. 20-21)

1 Corinthians 9:16 (NASB) "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."

People Group—People sharing the same ethnic identity, language, religion, and history.

Unreached People Group—Less than 2% Evangelical Christian.

According to the International Mission Board, there are 7,084 unreached people groups totaling about 4.4 billion people.

Unreached and Unengaged People Group—Less than 2% Evangelical Christian and there is no church-planting strategy consistent with evangelical faith and practice.

There are 229 million people in people groups that are unreached and unengaged.

Sermon: A Church Strategy That Pleases God

Romans 15:14-21

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I am usually not impressed with catchy little slogans but let me share one that I really like: “A church’s success is better measured by its sending capacity than its seating capacity.” What I am about to say is not meant to be boasting, but to give you reason to rejoice. I am not holding our church up as an example of a church that always does it right. We have done some things poorly, and we’ve made some costly errors in how we have sent out. Having said that, I believe that because God knows our hearts, He has done a great work through most of our sending endeavors. To God alone goes the glory for the fruit we have seen in many of our endeavors. Allow me to give you some specifics. We have sent out scores of people for two church revitalizations. Let me make it simple what God has done with these revitalizations. There were two churches that were close to death and today are flourishing because of the unselfish members of this church who were willing to follow God’s guidance and leave their comfort zone here and go to First Baptist Fountain City and Norwood Baptist Church. Several years ago, we sent over sixty people with one of our elders to a church plant in the inner city. We have helped send families with ties to our church to do church planting in hard areas of the USA. We are the major supporting church for the Duvalls in Salt Lake City. There are more examples I could give of the past, but I am going to focus on the future.

Over the last few months, our church has been through some difficult times. Here is what we’ve learned during these trials. We have learned that when we humble ourselves, when we repent, when we are transparent, and when we seek God and desire only to do whatever it takes to follow Him, He will not set us aside but will use us again for His glory. What I am about to say is not just motivational hype, or wishful thinking. I truly believe that our best years (as God defines “best”) are still ahead of us. I do not ever want to be a part of a church whose headlights are on its rear bumper.

Our God has put a heart for the nations in the DNA of this church. I don’t know exactly how long He plans for me to be here as Senior Pastor, but I do know that it is not about me. It is not tied to me, or any other elder or leader of this church. It is about God and this church fulfilling the missions focused agenda that He has called us to. When our hearts align with the heart of God for the nations, we will see God do amazing things through us – greater things than we have ever seen or even dreamed of.

In this message, we are going look at a church strategy that pleases God. We will cover Romans 15:14-21, but the most important part of the message is verses 20-21. In verses 20-21, Paul is talking about the priority of reaching the unreached in areas where there is little or no access to the Gospel. Let me tell you why this is so important. Reaching the unreached is dear to the heart of God! Listen to this quote from a publication of our International Missions Board:

The theme of God’s heart for people groups and nations runs from Genesis to Revelation. God has made it clear in His word that He intends to bring the blessings of His salvation to every people group on earth (Genesis 12:11-3, Psalm 66, Isaiah 49:6, Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:45-47, Acts 1:8, Romans 14:20-21, Revelation 5:9, and Revelation 7:9-10, among many others).

[*Foundations*, The International Mission Board, page 43]

To read just one of those references – Revelation 5:9: “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.’”

From Romans 15:14-21 we will see what a healthy church that will go to the nations looks like. To put it another way, we will see the strategy of a church that pleases God.

I. God Is Pleased with a Strategy to Mature the Members (v. 14)

These qualities that Paul commends are manifestations of a spiritually mature church that knows and lives out the Word of God. Genuine spiritual maturity in a church cannot be achieved with gimmicks and a diet of short “how to” messages that are not taken directly from an exposition of the Scriptures. What do mature members look like?

A. Mature Members Are Filled with Goodness (v. 14a)

As the members of the church mature and are led by and filled with the Holy Spirit, they will manifest the fruit of the Spirit. One of the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit is “goodness” (Galatians 5:22). That word assumes both moral and ethical goodness, but it primarily means good works. This goodness is *not* a part of procuring salvation, but it is an *evidence* of salvation. A part of our strategy in reaching our local area is genuine acts of goodness. I’m talking about goodness that flows out of changed hearts and love for others. It starts with others in our community. I commend you that while we could always improve, we as a church body are quite involved in goodness (good works). There are so many things that go on behind the scenes that not many know about. I don’t know about all of them. Allow me to give a few examples to rejoice in. There is the community trash pick up, clean up after the Christmas and July 4th parades, the acts of kindness by deacons in ministering to widows and others who need help (including going to those in need who aren’t connected to our church), the children’s camp ministry (CBM), ministry to schools, and so much more. I’m not even including those who give large numbers of hours to our facilities and FBA. That’s just scratching the surface of all the acts of goodness that are happening. We have not arrived in being full of goodness; there is always more that can be done.

B. Mature Members Are Filled with Knowledge (v. 14b)

In this context, the knowledge spoken of is the knowledge of God’s Word. In other words, they were doctrinally sound because they knew God’s Word. A mature church is filled with hungry students of God’s Word. They study it on their own; they take advantage of opportunities to learn more. One of the criticisms of our church is that we focus on teaching the Word, but we are not so good on building relationships. I think that there is some validity to that and the elders and pastoral staff have made remedying that a high priority. However, we are not going to weaken or pull back from the teaching of God’s Word. We simply desire to provide a structure where more relationships can be built without weakening the growth in the Word.

C. Mature Members Are Able to Admonish One Another (v. 14c)

In addition to being filled with goodness and knowledge, maturity of the membership means that we come to the place of being competent to admonish one another. Let’s make sure that we understand what that word “admonish” means. I like the translation in the Williams New Testament (WNT): Romans 15:14 (WNT): “As far as I am concerned about you, my brothers, I am convinced that you especially are abounding in the highest goodness, richly supplied with perfect knowledge and *competent to counsel one another.*” That is a great translation of the last part of verse 14 – “competent to counsel one another.” This word translated “admonish” means to encourage, confront, and warn. It can correctly be translated “counsel”. A mature church is able, competent to counsel one another. I am convinced that the vast majority of counseling in a church should be carried out by the members who, out of their knowledge of the Word, counsel others who are facing perplexing trials and tough decisions.

The biblical strategy for a flourishing healthy church starts with a strategy for maturing the members. If this element is left out of any growth strategy, we may gather a crowd, but those gathered will not be true world changers. Without maturing members, we will be a church like the one described by Vance Havner – “They are many, but not much.”

II. God Is Pleased with a Strategy to Minister the Gospel of God (vv. 15-16)

Let's define that phrase "the gospel of God" in verse 16. The word "gospel" means good news. The good news of God is that He has reached down to us in mercy by withholding the judgment we deserve and giving us His love and provision for forgiveness of sin that we did not deserve. The gospel of God is that God sent His only begotten Son to drink the cup of God's wrath that we deserved so that all who repent and believe on His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, will receive His life which is eternal life. Any church strategy that pleases God will focus on motivating the members to share the gospel of God with others as a way of life. What motivated Paul in the proclaiming and applying that wonderful gospel of God? His motive was his love for God and His desire to please this one he treasured above everything and everyone.

Oh, what a difference it would make if we had this approach to, this motive for sharing the gospel. We are not to be sharing the gospel primarily because we are commanded, and we don't like the consequences of disobedience. We are not sharing the gospel of God primarily for the sake of those who are lost and need to be saved (both are legitimate *secondary* motives). We share the gospel with the lost because we love and treasure God and long to please and honor Him by bringing to Him those that He sent His Son to die for.

III. God Is Pleased with a Strategy to Magnify the Glory of God (vv. 17-19)

If the church exists for the glory of God, then any strategy to grow the church should major on magnifying His glory. Is all this talk about everything existing for the glory of God just talk? If not, then the glory of God ought to be foremost on our minds as we develop a strategy to grow His church. The apostle Paul did a lot of boasting. It was the kind of boasting that turned the spotlight on God and magnified Him and made His name famous among the nations. 2 Corinthians 10:17: "But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord." Paul's boasting was always in the Lord. Paul refused to allow the spotlight to be turned on him. He gloried, he boasted in the Lord and what the Lord had done through him. How do we make magnifying the glory of God a part of our strategy? Though it isn't mentioned in this passage, the obvious answer is that we prioritize prayer. The foundation, the power of any strategy is prayer. When prayer is central to our strategy, then when the church begins to grow, God gets the glory because it was to Him that we were looking and asking and pleading. We magnify the glory of God through prioritizing prayer in our strategy.

In verse 19, Paul shares a little of what God has done and for which He receives the glory. To authenticate Paul's apostleship and authority, before the New Testament was completed and distributed to the churches, God gave signs and wonders. Paul didn't do the wonders in His own power; he gave glory to God. God enabled Paul to travel (mostly by foot) over 1400 miles sharing the gospel (v. 19). That is what Paul gloried in – what God had empowered him to do and how God provided for all he needed.

IV. God Is Pleased with a Strategy for Missions to the Unreached (vv. 20-21)

This last point is the heart of the message. Paul's primary calling was to the unreached – those who had never heard the Gospel of God. After Jesus rose from the dead, He told His disciples four times that they were to proclaim the Gospel to the whole human race. Paul took that command seriously and so should we. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16: "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." Woe to us as a church if we do not go proclaiming the Gospel.

The need is astounding. Missions organizations don't speak much about countries anymore. They talk about "people groups". What is a "people group"? A people group shares the same ethnic identity,

language, religion, and history. One people group can live in several different countries. Missions statisticians say that any people group that has less than 2% evangelical Christians is considered unreached. According to the International Mission Board there are 7,084 unreached people groups totaling about 4.4 billion people. Here is an astounding statistic. 229 million people are in people groups that are unreached and “unengaged” – there is no church planting strategy consistent with evangelical faith and practice. Let this sink in: 229 million people are in people groups that are less than 2% Christian and no mission organization no church is seeking to reach them. This is more than just meaningless numbers; it is people who will die without ever hearing the Gospel unless someone goes.

Here is my challenge. While we are sending teams to places of great need (and we should be, and we should send even more), we are not currently, regularly as a church going to what Paul describes as people where Christ is not named (unreached, unengaged people groups). I am not calling for us to stop going where we are going. I am calling us in addition to go to people groups where “Christ is not named”. We have considerable experience in that. Over the last ten to twelve years we have focused on two unreached unengaged people groups. One of these unreached, unengaged people groups is in a very, very remote and hard to get to place in East Asia. We have not given up on this remote place. We are waiting for God to open a door or show us how to knock down some doors. But for the remainder of our time, I want to focus on what was an unreached unengaged people group in a very remote place in West Africa until God moved on the hearts of this church to go. One reason unreached people groups are unreached is because they are very difficult to reach. Our people group in West Africa has a population of about 300,000. The information we could gather from our own mission board estimated less than one-hundred believers. In April 2007, four of us went to find this group. We were led by a missionary who lived several hours away. I will share some bullet points about what happened over the next six years.

- On the first vision trip, God providentially led us to a church where about forty of the estimated one-hundred believers attended (through wrong directions given to us by a policeman).
- Over the next six years, we sent twenty-one more teams to go into the remote areas to find villages of our people group. All in all, we found about fifty-seven mostly small villages (most were accessible only by foot or motorcycle) and got GPS locations. We were able to share the Gospel with most all the chiefs of these villages.
- That church where we found some of the few believers from our UPG had doctrine identical to ours. They admitted with great sorrow that they had shown little interest in reaching this UPG we adopted and were convicted that we came all that way to reach people in their area. The Lord put a burden on them to make it their mission to send believers into the villages of our UPG to share the Gospel and hopefully establish churches.
- We sent multiple teams to train the local Christians how to disciple new believers.

As of a few years ago, our mission board (rightly so) because of terrorism will not allow us to go back, but we believe that God’s word will not return void and whether we know about it or not many of those believers we trained in discipleship are continuing to evangelize and disciple people from our UPG who are no longer unengaged.

Conclusion

Are you a mature child of God? Are you filled with goodness, filled with the knowledge of His Word, and mature enough to admonish (counsel) others with needs? Are you regularly ministering to the lost motivated not primarily by the needs of the lost, but by an ever-deepening love for God? Are you

purposefully seeking to magnify the Lord in all you do, but especially by sharing the good news, the Gospel? Are you ready to be on the front lines of reaching those who little or no access to the Gospel?