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Romans

Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. Romans 15:17

In the previous verse, Paul clearly laid out his ministerial service as one of a priestly role. In this capacity and because of it, he now states "therefore." In essence, "Because of that, therefore this." And then he moves directly into his explanation - "I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God." In this thought, he uses the exact same Greek term, *ta pros ton Theon*, "in things which pertain to God" which is later used in Hebrews 5:1 -

"For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins."

This then shows that what he was referring to in verse 16 is to be interpreted as pertaining to functions of a priestly nature. His ministry, which is directed to the Gentile people, has been specially instituted "that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." And because it is, Paul has a reason "to glory in Christ Jesus."

The word "to glory" is variously translated as "boast," "be enthusiastic," "have pride," "brag," etc. But despite the personal nature of the word, it is a boasting which is not for himself, but "in Christ Jesus." Ultimately, Christ made the

selection, Christ gave the strength, Christ endowed with the wisdom to convey, and so forth. He is the "author and finisher" of our faith and thus whatever is our boast, it ultimately belongs to Him. As Paul will later state in 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31 -

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'"

To personally boast in what one hasn't earned is self-seeking and conceited. And the premise of our salvation, sanctification, duties in Christ, glorification, etc. is that it is all God's work in and through us. And so, to God be the glory. Without the cross, none of it would be possible. Because of the cross everything else in the process then comes by His grace.

Life application: When we accomplish a deed for the Lord, be it small or great, we must ultimately give God the glory for it. We wouldn't be in the Lord if it wasn't for the Lord's work. Likewise, the Holy Spirit wouldn't have been granted without the Lord's work. And the deeds could not have come about without either. It all inevitably goes back to the glory of God.

For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—
Romans 15:18

In the preceding verse, Paul stated "Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God." In substantiation of this, he begins this verse with "for." There was sufficient reason for him to glory in the matters related to his ministry for God and to demonstrate his apostolic authority based on Christ's effective working in him. Because of this he says that he "will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me."

And so when he notes his accomplishments, the words and the deeds were brought about not by his own power, but by the power of Christ. In Acts and in his epistles, there are evidences of miracles and signs being brought about through him and yet they aren't the main focus of his ministry. If they were, one might think that they were either made up or that he was somehow endowed with these in his own right, but because they are noted incidentally, it is evident that they were the result of Christ working in him.

In fact, there are times when the miracles were lacking. In 2 Timothy 4:20, he said he "left Trophimus sick in Miletus." In 1 Timothy 5:23, he told Timothy to "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities." If Paul were the one to wield these powers, or if he had authority over the Spirit of Christ in him, he could have "claimed healing in Jesus' name" and taken care of both of these. Even more to the point was his own affliction. He asked for it to be removed from him three times and yet the Lord left him with it saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 12 Corinthians 12:9.

By these things, it is manifest that what is noted and the healings that were wrought were solely by the work of Christ in Him. Because this is so, there was no boasting in Him, but rather glorying in Christ Jesus. And what is the purpose of these things? It is that "in word and deed" Christ was working through Paul "to make the Gentiles obedient." Paul's ministry was unique in that he was the "Apostle to the Gentiles." Christ worked through him to secure for Himself a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

What is apparent from this is that the church is dependent on the letters of Paul for its direction and edification. What he writes is our doctrine. At some point, the church age will end and Israel will again be the focus of God's attention, but until that occurs, we are to rely on the directives given by Paul - not because they are from him personally, but because they are from Christ through him and specifically designed for this dispensation - the Church Age.

Life application: Paul never claimed anything as his right - healing, miracles, wonders, etc. Instead, he allowed the Lord to work through him. Let's use this as an example in our own lives. By claiming something in the Lord's name to which we are not entitled, we bring embarrassment on ourselves and discredit upon His name.

...in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. Romans 15:19

This verse is the second half of what Paul stated yesterday. In context and in its entirety, it says, "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

Paul's boasting was in what Christ accomplished through him, not in his own deeds. Christ's work was manifest "in mighty signs and wonders." A good example of this type of deed is found in Acts 19:11, 12 -

"Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them."

Unlike so many charlatans who fill the halls of Christianity today with false workings which have nothing to do with the Spirit but are often acts engaged in for the profit of those employed in the tricks, these were truly manifestations of the work of Christ "by the power of the Spirit of God." They are attested to in God's word and they were given and confirmed in order to establish the apostolic work of Paul.

Endowed with this power in which Christ worked through Paul, he made a circuit "from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum." Although his ministry didn't actually begin in Jerusalem, he uses Jerusalem as the center of his discourse because it is the center of the gospel message from which Christ's word has gone out. Paul, like the other apostles, carried this message from Jerusalem outward. Paul's ministry was in a circular route and he uses Illyricum as a destination because it was in the outward part of the arc of the circle, being in the area of modern day Croatia.

Whether he actually went into Illyricum or not isn't known, but he travelled at least to its borders. In his travels, he covered an immense amount of land and came into contact with many cultures and people. He was a tireless servant of the Lord and in all that he did, he "fully preached the gospel of Christ." This gospel message and those endowed with its witness are noted in his first letter to the Corinthians -

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." 1 Corinthians 15:3-7

Life application: Paul's ministry was one bearing apostolic authority. The apostolic age ended with the completion of the Bible. The foundation of the "prophets and apostles" which proclaim Christ has been laid. The Bible bears witness to the work of God in Christ and through the apostles. Now it is our job to use this witness, the Holy Bible, for the building up and edification of the church.

And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,... Romans 15:20

In his previous thoughts, Paul has said that it is Christ working through him in the things which pertain to God. Endowed with this ability and with the gift of this ministry he went "from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum" fully preaching the gospel of Christ.

In this capacity (and so he states here), he lets the Romans know that "I have made it my aim to preach the gospel..." The Greek word translated as "made it my aim" reflects an earnest desire or ambition. It has been his heart's goal to preach "not where Christ was named." Paul saw his ministry as a foundational one. He set out to establish churches rather than move into those areas where one was already established and thus "build on another man's foundation."

God has endowed all people with certain desires and abilities. There are those who are missionaries, telling the gospel for the very first time. There are others who will establish churches, thus bringing together those who may already know Christ but not have a place of worship. There are preachers, teachers, and congregants. Everyone has a place within the body and at times the duties or missions overlap.

Paul's goal was preaching and teaching to new converts. He didn't just give the gospel and move on, but after receiving converts, he would disciple them. This is seen, for example, in Acts 19:9, 10 -

"But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."

He was there to evangelize and he stayed and taught daily for two years. But he also wrote letters of instruction and encouragement such as the epistle to the Romans. There in Rome was a group of believers who had already come together, probably without any apostolic leadership. These converts might have been from

the group who came to Christ in Jerusalem, such as those recorded in Acts 2 at the first Pentecost of the Church Age. However they were established, Paul was writing to them for the sake of both exhortation and doctrine.

He hoped to eventually go to Rome and meet with them, but without violating his precept of preaching "not where Christ was named" but rather as a stop for fellowship on his way to Spain (Romans 15:24).

Life application: In order to be an effective member of the church, one needs to decide what it is they can do to benefit the body. If sitting in church listening to instruction is all you wish to do, make sure to leave a gift or offering. If you wish to go overseas and be a missionary, it takes planning and funding. First think about what you wish to do and then determine to do it through reasonable planning and in a way which will benefit the church.

...but as it is written:

**"To whom He was not announced, they shall see;
And those who have not heard shall understand." Romans 15:21**

Once again, and for the last time in his epistle, Paul turns to Scripture to confirm the validity of his apostolic ministry to the Gentiles. He begins with "but as it is written."

The "but" is given as a contrast to what he just said, "And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation..." Instead of building where others had already laid a foundation, he was determined to go to where the word had not yet been preached. As Israel had already received the news about Jesus, this then implies that the word was to go beyond Israel - to the Gentiles. With this thought in mind, he says, "as it is written."

Paul returns to the Scriptures to substantiate the going forth of the gospel beyond Israel and therefore there must be a herald of this message; an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul saw himself as this instrument of God. The final portion of Scripture that he will cite in Romans comes from his often-used prophet, Isaiah. Here he cites the intent of Isaiah 52:15 which reads in its entirety -

"So shall He sprinkle many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths at Him;
For what had not been told them they shall see,
And what they had not heard they shall consider."

This is from the "Suffering Servant" passage of Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 which speaks of the work of Jesus as the Messiah on His first advent. From the un-cited portion of the verse, we see that Isaiah was speaking of Christ sprinkling "many nations." This implies that His blood would be shed not only for Israel, but all of the Gentile people as well. Next Isaiah said that "Kings shall shut their mouths at Him." Again, "kings" is in the plural. This indicates that the rulers of many nations will be silent before Him, acknowledging His Lordship.

Paul's citation then begins at this point. He amends the verse for the context of his epistle, but he doesn't substantially change the meaning. This message about the Christ whose blood would be shed for the Gentiles would be carried out to them. They would go from a state of unknowing to that of perceiving what God had done. They would go from having not heard, to clarity of understanding. And the only way this could come about was if someone actually went and told them. Paul understood this and is conveying the message that he is that messenger.

If he went where someone had already laid the foundation, then they would already have had the word announced; they would already see; they would have heard; and they would have understood. But Paul's ministry was one of carrying the word to ears that had never heard. Imagine his thoughts as he wrote to the Romans, "God was speaking about me through the words of Isaiah..." It must have been a humbling notion. About 700 years before his birth, God implied that Paul would be God's herald of the good news of Jesus Christ to the nations!

Life application: In a way, when we participate in mission work to have the gospel message carried to those who have never heard it, we are actually participating in the fulfilling of prophecy. Without boasting or thinking too highly of the part we play, we can tenderly look at the words of Isaiah and say to ourselves, "God knew that I would be a part of the fulfillment of this great plan of His." It is a humbling thought.

For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.

Romans 15:22

In Romans 1:9-15, Paul explained his desire to come to Rome and fellowship with them. And in verse 1:13, he said this -

"Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now)..."

Since that verse, he has given his discourse on the many issues which were on his mind. Finally in verse 22, he has stated that, "For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you." It is as if that opening statement all the way at the beginning was the impetus for this masterful epistle. Only after explaining the many issues of the faith has he now returned to explain why he was hindered. In other words, this concern was his "foot in the door" for explaining the many doctrinal matters that he wanted to impart.

In his statement "I have been hindered" he uses a word which is in the imperfect tense. This denotes that it was a continuous problem which implies that he had one hindrance after another as he strived to reach his desired goal of visiting the Romans. Those hindrances are a part of his thought in verse 15:19 when he noted that "from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

In his travels, in his evangelistic endeavors, and in his preaching of the gospel where it had not previously been preached - in these actions he was held back from actually making it to Rome. This then shows Paul's dedication to the ministry to which he had been called. Despite his great desire to fellowship with the Romans, the call of preaching the gospel had to be of paramount importance. In this, he hoped the Romans would understand the reception of a letter rather than the welcoming of the person into their presence.

Life application: As followers of Christ, there are things we should be doing and there are things we wish to be doing. These will at times conflict with each other. Using Paul's example in the book of Romans, we will find what is right and pleasing to the Lord. Paul strongly desired to visit those in Rome, but he knew that the preaching of the gospel was of supreme importance and so he placed his desires on the back burner and proceeded to continue walking on the path laid before him, proclaiming the gospel to those who needed to hear it.

But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you,... Romans 15:23

Speaking of his ministry which went in a circle from Jerusalem around to Illyricum, Paul felt that he had covered the entire area in a manner sufficient to say that there was no longer any place that wasn't evangelized. Considering the amount of area and the immense number of towns and people, he was making quite a claim. But it should be remembered that he certainly instructed those he evangelized to continue on with the effort just as he had. Therefore, along with his work, those he brought to Jesus would have continued the process.

Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, though written later, give his instructions on the establishment and conduct of churches. When writing to Titus, he says this -

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you..." Titus 1:5

So it is not at all improbable that the message, either directly by Paul or by those he trained, got to the entire region just as he claims here. And because of this, he now tells the Romans of his yearning to come to them. He had set aside his desires for the sake of spreading the gospel and he now felt that he could follow through with what he so long wished to do without compromising anything in the process.

Life application: Stick to what is necessary first and foremost. Only when that is accomplished should we endeavor to follow our other, less important desires. There is a world full of people who need to hear the good news. Don't let TV or fun parties dull you to what should be the first priority in life.

...whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. Romans 15:24

Paul's intent, which is expressed in the previous verse, was to come to Rome for a visit, but this was not the purpose of coming there. Rather, it was only to be a stop on the way to Spain. Once again, Paul's life was directed to mission-type evangelism. He desired to preach the gospel where it had not yet been preached and to establish churches as he went. His desire to visit Rome was merely to fellowship with them, encourage them, and as a point of stopping for help along the way.

In this verse, he uses the Roman term for Spain, Hispania, rather than the common Greek term, Iberia. The Iberian peninsula included the entire region of Spain and Portugal. This was Paul's next goal in his work. It is not clear if he actually ever made it to Spain. He was imprisoned in Rome, but some early writings state that he was released for two years before being imprisoned again. In these two years, it is claimed that he actually went to Spain.

Regardless of whether he made it there or not, he stated that he hoped "to be helped on my way by you." This sentiment is found at other times in the New Testament. A notable one is found in 3 John -

"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well..." (6, 7)

It was incumbent on the established churches to assist missionaries because there was little help to be expected from the gentiles. This wasn't because of the coldness of the gentiles so much as it was a policy of the missionaries. The less burden on those being evangelized, the better. Paul remained a tent maker during his working years in order to not be a burden on those he ministered to. This is still seen in the mission world today. Support normally comes from the sending churches, not from those who receive the missionaries.

And so, in order to receive their help and to fellowship with them, he desired to visit them in Rome that he might "enjoy" their company for a while. The term he uses implies being gratified or satisfied in their fellowship. He was looking forward to coming to them in need of their encouragement and leaving fully encouraged.

Life application: The need for missionaries has never ended. The world still has many places which haven't heard the gospel. But mission work is not an end in and of itself. It should be a means of establishing churches and then moving on. Too often, mission work devolves into a constant state of externally supplied ministry. Rather, our missionaries should encourage self-sufficiency among those they evangelize.

But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. Romans 15:25

Before he makes any anticipated visit to Rome on his way to Spain, Paul notes that he first intends to go "to Jerusalem to minister to the saints." This is one of many internal clues that the epistle is authentic. In Acts 19:21, we read this -

"When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.'"

Acts supports Paul's words in Romans and his words here and in other epistles support the account in Acts. The Bible is a unified work which internally validates itself again and again. As we read its pages, we can have the confidence that there truly was a guiding Hand of inspiration as the Holy Spirit breathed out God's word through the various authors.

In both 1 & 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem and he will explain the necessity for this collection and ministry a bit more in the verses ahead. It must be remembered that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and therefore, in order to maintain harmony between the Jewish believers and the Gentiles, whatever he could do for the Jews in Jerusalem would help in that endeavor. And so he painstakingly and meticulously prepared his collection for them and wanted to be present when it was transferred to those in need in Jerusalem.

Life application: Gifts and offerings are still as important today as they were in the early church. They should be considered carefully and given in a way which the most beneficial use of the money is made. Why would anyone give to a church which supports issues such as abortion or sexual perversion, either locally or within the hierarchy? We are accountable to the Lord for what we do with our gifts, so just as Paul did, cautiously consider how you will handle your giving.