

“Christ Working Through Us”
Romans 15:15-21
(Preached at Trinity, December 4, 2011)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Scripture warns us frequently of the danger of boasting.
In 1Cor. Paul declared that in salvation God has put to death every degree of boasting.
1 Corinthians 1:27-29 NAU - "but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God."
2. So what is Paul doing here in **Verse 17**?
Romans 15:17 NAU - "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God."
 - A. He is doing precisely what we are permitted to do. In fact, he is doing what we must do. We must glory in Christ.
1 Corinthians 1:31 NAU - "so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."
 - B. Paul says, "I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God." What things? The word "therefore" provides us some help. Paul is referring us back to what he has just spoken.
 1. By "things" pertaining to God Paul is referring to the *work* of God. He is boasting of the marvel of God's work. I think the ESV misinterprets the verse. This is why translators have to be careful when they try to smooth out the translation. The ESV reads:
Romans 15:17 ESV - "In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God."
 - a. The word "work" is not actually in the text. Paul simply uses a neuter article which is properly translated simply "things."
τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν
 - b. And then Paul uses the Greek preposition *πρὸς* which can be translated in various ways but here combined with the article simply translates, "things concerning God or according to God or pertaining to God."
 - c. Paul has in mind God things. What God is doing.
 2. So, what was God doing?
 - a. Paul had observed God's grace upon the Roman church
Verse 14 – God had affected them morally – "full of goodness"
God had affected them theologically – "all knowledge"
The Gospel had worked in them to such a degree that they were able to edify one another.

- b. Paul was also marveling in what God had done in his life
- Verse 15** - Paul was able to speak with boldness because of God's call upon his life.
- Verse 16** - As God's minister Paul was witnessing the transforming power of the Gospel. Paul was offering up genuine converts as a sweet smelling savor to God by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.
- C. "Therefore" Paul has found reason for boasting.
3. Paul concludes in **Verse 18** that it is because of his marvel over all that God was accomplishing that he would not speak of anything, he would have no cause for boasting except in what Christ was accomplishing through Him; that Gentiles were being brought to obedience -- *solī Deo Gloria* – To God alone be all the glory.
 4. This morning I want to preach on the subject of our boast in Christ. I title the sermon, "Christ Working Through Us" but I actually want to look at the subject under two points:
 - I. The work of Christ *in* us
 - II. The work of Christ *through* us
- I. The work of Christ *in* us
- A. Paul never ceased to marvel at the grace of God
 1. In **Verse 15** he wrote of God's grace given to him. He is speaking of the grace of God in equipping him for his work. But the first demonstration of this grace was in Paul's conversion. This was always the order for Paul. First, praise for God's grace in conversion and then praise for God's grace in equipping us for service. Listen to his words to Timothy:
2 Timothy 1:5-6 KJV - "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. ⁶ Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."
 2. Paul applied this to his own life as well. His first marvel was over his conversion – it was his lifelong wonder – he never ceased to stand in awe
1 Timothy 1:13-15 NAU - "even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*."
1 Timothy 1:15 KJV - "of whom I am chief."
1 Timothy 1:15 NIV - "of whom I am the worst."
 3. His conversion was a stunning show of God's grace and power

- B. Then God by His Spirit equipped Paul for his life of service
1. God sanctified him that he might be an example of His grace
Paul always demonstrated with his life the reality of the Gospel. He always lived in a manner in which he could say, "Follow me!"
2 Thes. 3:7-9 NAU - "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; ⁹ not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example."
 2. Then God set Paul apart as an Apostle
Romans 1:1 NAU - "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God"
1 Corinthians 1:1 NAU - "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God"
1 Corinthians 15:9-10 NAU - "For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."
- C. Each of us have this mighty testimony
1. Each of you are able to share the marvel of what God has done for you.
 2. You should be able to testify of the change the Gospel has wrought upon your life
 3. And you should be able to share of God's rich gift of grace in equipping you for service. Each of us have particular gifts that God has give through His Spirit for the building of His church.
 - For some, it is the gift of service – the love of laboring for Christ. Every church is blessed with large portions of these people.
 - For some it's the gift of giving – a particular love for giving sacrificially to the work of the Kingdom.
 - For some it may be a particular giftedness in evangelism
 - Some have been gifted in administration – the ability to organize
 - Some have been gifted of teaching
 - Some have the gift of encouragement
 - Some have the gift of mercy

II. The work of Christ *through* us

- A. Paul was always amazed at what God was doing *through* him
1. He had nothing else of which to boast
Romans 15:17 NAU - "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God."
Romans 15:18 NAU - "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me"
 2. The power of God was demonstrated mightily in him. Paul describes the particular manifestations of his apostolic office
Romans 15:19 NAU - "in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit"
2 Corinthians 12:12 KJV - "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds."
Acts 5:12 KJV - "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people"
 3. Paul had witnessed God's mighty power work through him
 - a. He wrote a large percentage of the NT
 - b. He conducted three major missionary journeys – numerous churches were planted, multitudes were brought to faith and transformed through his preaching of the Gospel. He took Christianity that was largely a Jewish movement and carried it to the world.
 - c. His influence in the lives of many of the early church leaders cannot be overestimated
 4. But he knew the power in all of this was not his own. It was the work of God working *through* him.
Romans 15:18 NAU - "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,"
Romans 15:19 NAU - "in the power of the Spirit"
 5. There was a time when Paul had great confidence in his natural ability.
 - a. He had a great heritage – born of the tribe of Benjamin. He had a great education having been educated under Gamaliel. He had great Jewish credentials having served as a Pharisee. He had a great record, considering himself perfect in his observance of the Law and zealous in defending God.
Philippians 3:4 NAU - "although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:"
 - b. After God saved him all of this had changed
Philippians 3:7-8 NAU - "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ "

6. In Christ Paul's confidence was in the mighty power of God working through the Gospel.

Romans 1:16 NAS - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NAU - " And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

- B. Let us pause now so that each of you can consider the testimony of your own life?

1. Have you seen the mighty power of God working in you?
2. First, you have the testimony of your conversion. You are not what you were.
3. What about your service? Can you see God working in you? Can you see giftedness that goes beyond your mere natural ability?

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 NAU - "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

4. Perhaps you say, I don't know what my gifts are. You discover your strengths by doing. No athlete discovered his abilities by sitting on the couch watching TV. No musician ever discovered his ability without ever picking up an instrument.

5. Perhaps you say, but Paul was unique. He had exceptional ability.

- a. This is the whole point. He didn't equate anything to his own ability.

- b. Imagine going to a pagan town that knew nothing about God and were given over entirely to idolatry. This would be a fearful thing.

Listen to Paul:

1 Corinthians 2:1-3 NAU - "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,"

- c. And what about his abilities.

- It would seem that his oratory skills were not superb.

2 Corinthians 10:10 NAU - "For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.""

- And most agree that Paul's eyesight was terrible.

1 Corinthians 16:21 ESV - "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand."

- And don't forget his thorn in the flesh. Whatever it was it was a continued hardship and a continued reminder of God's power in spite of his weakness.
F.F. Bruce – "If his ministry was so effective despite this physical weakness, then the transcendent power was manifestly God's not his own. They constantly reminded him not so much of his own inadequacy as of the total adequacy of Christ, in whom, when he was personally weak, he knew himself to be most strong."
6. God always chooses that weak that He might receive all the glory.
 - a. Moses was a terrible speaker
Exodus 4:10 NAS - "Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.""
 - b. Gideon cried out to God, **Judges 6:15 NAU** - "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."
 - c. David was the most unlikely of Jesse's sons and largely overlooked by his family.
 - d. Peter trembled in fear before a young girl on the night Jesus was taken, yet he would later preach boldly as God's power was made manifest in him. (I tremble every time I pass out tracts at LSU)
 - e. Listen to God's testimony:
1 Corinthians 1:26-29 NAU - " For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God."

Conclusion:

1. God didn't save you because you were more worthy, more wise, more impressive. And He isn't impressed by your natural ability.
2. So could it be that you haven't seen God's mighty power working through you because you haven't placed yourself safely in His service, trusting in His strength.
2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NAU - "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."
3. May each of us have the heart of Isaiah:
Isaiah 6:8 NAU - "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"
4. And may God grant us great hearts of faith trusting in Him to do great things through us.