

Romans 15:14-15 (NKJV)

14 Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,

So, last week Paul told his readers that he had great confidence in their spiritual maturity. He told them that he regarded them as filled with goodness and knowledge and competent to counsel one another. That is quite an endorsement. I hope that Paul would say something like that to us if he were writing a letter to us. Would he write, Hi Ferndale church. I have heard about your faith. I have heard your reputation. I know you have been well trained. You have good theology. You are competent to counsel each other with God's word. You are filled with goodness. In other words, your faith is genuine. You are true believers.

Well, suppose he would write to us like that? How would we respond? Would we start getting big heads? Would we get proud?

Well, if we would, we would truly miss the point about what Christian virtues create in believers. The virtues that Paul emphasizes are simple evidence that these believers have even a greater capacity for faithfulness, a greater capacity for obedience, a greater capacity for understanding, than what they are currently living. In the kingdom of God he who has gets more. That is how it works. To whom much is given more will be required. We can see this very clearly in what Paul says next.

Have you ever thought, man I have just come through a tough time. I have been faithful when it was really hard to be faithful. Or maybe I have done ministry that was very strenuous. And about that time don't we think, man I would like to level off right here and get comfortable. I have done enough. I have been faithful enough. I have labored enough. I have struggled enough. Look at what God has done in my life. I am kind of satisfied just as I am. It's kinda like the disciples felt when Jesus was revealed in the transfiguration. And the disciples said, let's build houses. Let's live in this reality just as it is.

They didn't understand that events like those are the things that prepare us for the next acts of service.

That's why the first word Paul uses in verse 15 is nevertheless.

15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,

Even though you guys are doing well, even though you guys are growing spiritually, nevertheless I wrote some strong things to you. Now why would he write those bold confrontive truths to people who are already doing well? First, they could take it. They knew what to do with it. They were competent to be able to handle it. He didn't have to wear kid gloves with them. And second, they needed it. They had room for improvement. God is never finished with us in this life. There is always room to grow. There is always room to glorify Him even more...even better.

Have you ever watched a coach deal with his players. You might think that the ones on the bench would get the most attention. Aren't they the ones with the most to learn? Aren't they the ones needing the most improvement? But that isn't how it works. It is usually the best players who get the most candid criticisms. Why? Well partly they invite it. They want to be the best they can be. And the more they put into practice what they are told, the more they will be told.

Well that is how it is in our Christian walk as well. How much do you want to glorify God? How much do you yearn for that? How much do you want to be used of God? How much into His agenda for this world are you? Well the more you are committed to those things that are important to God, the more correction He will put in your direction. Others might seem to be able to wallow in their problems forever and God seems to allow it. But He won't do the same to you. He will cause circumstances in your life that brings those things to the forefront in such a way that you must do business with them. Why? Because of your immaturity? No. Oddly enough it is because of your maturity. Who did Christ rebuke the most harshly of the disciples? Probably Peter. And who was at least one of the three closest to Jesus? Peter.

When you become serious about growing spiritually, you invite God's scrutiny in even more enhanced levels. Sometimes it will seem unfair. But God is giving you what you want. So which would you prefer? Would you prefer that God lets you settle in where you are? Or would you prefer he shakes up your world to cause you to grow to glorify Him more. Would you like God to say, this child is fairly mature so I will allow him to stay where he is? Or would you like God to say, this child is growing in maturity. NEVERTHELESS, he is prepared for the next step and I am going to take him on to even greater maturity?

What do you want this morning? Tell God. You know He will act if what you want it to glorify Him even more. That is always a prayer that is in Jesus name.

I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,

Boldly- Paul was a bold guy.

Acts 13:45-46 (NKJV)

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

Look at this. Paul was not timid in the face of his enemies. He was not slow to do the thing God called him to do, no matter what the cost. Paul knew that by saying what he and Barnabas were saying, it was going to cost him dearly. But he would not be dissuaded.

They grew bold and they spoke the truth boldly.

Then again in Acts 14 we see

Acts 14:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Barnabas and Paul again speak boldly. They won't back down on the truth that most needs told. And here we see it again.

Acts 19:6-8 (NKJV)

6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

7 Now the men were about twelve in all.

8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

Paul wouldn't back down from the task at hand. It is interesting that I think every time the word bold is used in Paul's life it has to do with him speaking the truth. Paul may not have been bold about a lot of things. In fact we see in many places that he is very humble. But when Paul knows a truth needs told in the ministry to people, Paul is like a bulldog.

So Paul spoke boldly to the Romans. He knew they were mature. He knew there were some problems. He knew they had the maturity to hear and understand his teaching about those problems. He knew they wouldn't misunderstand to be offended. So nevertheless he spoke boldly.

Let's go on in our text:

as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,

As reminding you.

When I was studying the Bible at one point I wanted to know what the most frequent commands in the Bible were. Doesn't it stand to reason that the thing that is most often commanded in scripture is probably one of the most important things that we do in the Christian walk? So I did a word study. And guess which command came in the top 2? Remember.

Remember.

That is simply bringing to your mind something you already know.

When Paul was giving ministry directions to Timothy, his prime trainee, he told Timothy over and over again to remind the people he ministers to of the truth. It was clearly the prominent part of Timothy's job. If he did that well, he would be well on his way to being a competent minister.

Think about the implications of this.

First, most of what you need you likely already know.

Christianity is a bit odd in world religions because even the newest believer knows the most important information about God. The novice starts with the very core of God's methods to redeem people for himself.

Many other religions, and particularly cults, start at one point. Then once the person joins the club they learn deeper, more significant truths that only the initiated can know. There are levels of truth. It is almost like you need a security clearance to know the deepest truths. The deepest truths are hidden from the new converts.

But Christianity is completely different from that. When we understand the Gospel, we understand the heart of God's interaction with mankind. Not only that, all of our life applications find their root in the way we were saved. We understand that we were unworthy. We didn't deserve to even be allowed to breathe God's air. But God reached out to us and drew our attention to Christ. We eventually understood that Christ died in order to satisfy the wrath of God against the sin that we committed and the sinner that we are. At some point we understand that we need to receive by faith that Christ died for us and we receive his payment on our behalf. We then, as grateful children fall at Christ's feet in

worship of what He has done for us and our lives are, from that point on, no longer our own. We were bought at a price. We were redeemed by Christ's blood.

Now all of life gravitates around that truth.

So how does that have anything to do with how we live?

Well, suppose a fellow believer treats us in a way that we don't like. How do we respond? Well we go back to the gospel. How did we get to Christ? Was it by our merit? Did we deserve it? No. And how were we received? Did we have to pass an entrance exam that somehow qualified us? No. Christ received us when we were still sinners. OK then. How did our brother become a Christian? Well, the same way. So the most important thing about me and my brother in Christ is that Christ received us and forgave us in the same way. So if I am going to love my Savior, I must love those whom he loves. And none of those he loves deserves love any more than I do. So if they wrong me, I have no right to reject them. I cannot disown them. If they ask for forgiveness, I must forgive them the same way Christ forgave me. There is no new secret here. There is no mystical understanding. No. In fact it is really pretty simple. It all comes back to the way the Christ saved us. It all comes back to the first thing we learned as a Christian. Think about the epistles. Have you noticed that most of them start with focusing on some element of the gospel. They don't tell us how to act until they have taken us back to the roots of our salvation. They REMIND us of where we came from. They REMIND us of our standing in Christ. They REMIND us of our salvation. And then they go on to apply that truth.

Think about Romans. There are 8 chapters of straight theology with little application made. Then there is a side issue dealt with for three chapters. Then and only then are we given specific instructions on how to live. And all of the instructions are linked back to the Gospel given in chapters 1 through 8.

I have been reading a very good book called, "When sinners say I do." There are a couple quotes that are helpful to illustrate what I have been saying.

"The gospel is central to all theological truth, and is the overarching reality that makes sense of all reality. Never make the mistake of thinking that the gospel is only good for evangelism and conversion. By the Gospel we understand that, although saved, we remain sinners. Through the gospel we receive power to resist sin. Accurately understanding and continually applying the gospel IS the Christian life."

This book goes on to make the point that Christians are called to have marriages that function according to the heart of that gospel. When I read this I made the

connection to our text. I hope you can see it as well. The writer is talking about the gospel fleshed out.

He says,

A natural response to our spouse's sin is pure Matt 18:28- pay what you owe me and do it now. Our emotional reaction is not always a spiritual response, even if it feels right. We fear God's methods don't work. The biblical response, the idea of completely, forthrightly, and permanently forgiving a spouse and releasing him or her from all liability- can seem not only impossibly difficult but less than fully just. In the end the most common outcome is some wishy-washy middle ground- neither the sinful tantrum of demanding satisfaction or the godly extension of true forgiveness. It may be the inch deep, "Oh it's ok" that tries to pretend nothing ever happened. Perhaps it is the quick, "Of course I forgive you" while implying as long as you never do anything like that again. Of course we may instead simply refuse to forgive, holding our spouse's sin over the head like an old arrest warrant that could be prosecuted at any moment- what the bible calls bitterness.

But true forgiveness sees another's sin for the evil that it is, addresses it, then absorbs the cost of that sin by the power of God's abundant grace. Such forgiveness sets the sinner free; the account of the sin is closed, cancelled, blotted out, just as we see in Matt 18. Ken Sande says:

Forgiveness can be a costly activity. When you cancel a debt, it does not simply disappear. Instead you absorb a liability that someone else deserves to pay. Similarly forgiveness requires that you absorb certain effects of another person's sins and you release that person from liability to punishment. This is precisely what Christ accomplished on Calvary.

So there it is. There is nothing in us that would naturally choose the way of full, biblical forgiveness. It's just too hard, and adding to the challenge is the fact that the extension of true forgiveness can never guarantee we won't be wronged again. So why even consider it? Because forgiveness, full and free, is precisely what has been accomplished for us on Calvary. And the one who has been forgiven is now able to forgive others. Forgiven sinners forgive sin.

Then skipping forward, Forgiveness and repentance is the powerful tool that repairs the damage done to sin-torn marriage relationships. And where forgiveness is employed, and repentance is lived out, it transforms. Forgiveness, humbly sought and humbly given profoundly expresses the glory of God. Why? Because forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel- the true demonstration of God's love for those who deserved His wrath. As John Newton said so well, The

unchangableness of the Lord's love, and the riches of His mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the multiplied pardons he bestows upon His people, than if they needed no forgiveness at all.

We have been forgiven the greatest debt. Let's learn how to forgive the debtor we married. It's the way forward when sinners say "I do".

I was only using this as an example, but I think it is such a good one. Do you see it? The secret to living out a Christian marriage is no secret at all. The secret to loving one another in the body of Christ is no secret at all. The secret to loving the lost world around us is no secret at all. It is something we already know. It is something we just need reminded of. It all traces its way back to what Christ did for us in the Gospel. That transaction is the core of everything we ever need to do and everything we ever need to believe.

Look at your life this morning. If you have been a believer for several years, it is very likely that you do not need to know something new in order to move forward in your faithfulness to Christ. More than likely you simply need reminded.

Without a doubt, sometimes we need help understanding how the gospel applies to our current situation. It isn't always simple. Sometimes we might need outside help ferreting out our own resistance to applying the principles of the gospel to our situation. And sometimes we just need believers around us that won't allow us to pull the wool over our own eyes. But the ministry is usually one of reminding.

Look at your life this morning. What are you up against? Are you fighting a temptation? Are you struggling with a relationship? Are you in a trial of some kind? Where do you need help? The best place to start is the day you came to Christ. Consider how that applies to your situation today.

Do you need help? The church at Rome did. So my guess is the church at Ferndale will. If you need it, get it. It is available.

If you are called upon to minister to someone, keep in mind that most of what you will need to do is remind. You need to remind your brother or sister about how the gospel applies to their current situation.

Now Paul goes on from our text by saying:

because of the grace given to me by God

Remember that we had discussed that Paul didn't start this church. And he wrote to them some things that may have been difficult to hear. Here Paul tells them of the authority he has to address them. When he talks about the grace given to me by God, he probably is not talking about the grace that saved him. He was talking

about the position that God appointed him to. Paul is not writing some personal opinions he may have had on some matters he felt strongly about. He was writing as an apostle to a church who needed the message he had to give them.

We see in Romans 1

Romans 1:1-6 (NKJV)

1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,

3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,

4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,

6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

In verse 5 we see the use of the word grace in the context of Paul's apostleship.

Notice that grace even applies to the position Paul has. Paul did not attain apostleship. He didn't work his way up the chain of command. It was given to Paul despite his lack of merit. Really, if you were God appointing apostles, would you pick a person whose previous ventures including tracking Christians down to persecute them? No. That would have to be grace.

Next week we will look at Paul's roles as Paul the Priest, Paul the preacher, and Paul the pioneer.