

Romans 15:16-21 (NKJV)

Paul the priest

16 that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul the preacher

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

**18 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--
19 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 the pioneer

20 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,

21 but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."

Remember that the context is Paul **explaining himself** to the church in Rome. He has just written a very lengthy letter to them about the Gospel. He has never visited the church and he had nothing to do with **starting** the church.

He begins describing his ministry in verse 16. We normally read the New King James translation, but I don't think it captures the essence of the verse as well as the English Standard Version. ESV says this

Romans 15:16 (ESV)

16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

You see, all the language in the Greek in this verse uses words that would be instantly identified by the Jewish audience as used in the **service of the priest**. First the word in 16 for minister is a word normally used for two things. **Civil** service and **priestly** service. It is used in scripture as one busied with holy things. It would have been instantly recognized as referring to a **priestly duty** to his audience.

The word for ministering is also a word used for someone **busied with sacred things**, to perform sacred rites. It is usually used for the person who is sacrificing something in the priestly service.

The word for offering was also used describing the priestly duty of **offering an expiatory sacrifice** or an offering for sin.

And the word for acceptable is also used in scripture referring to sacrifices.

1 Peter 2:5 (NKJV)

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This fact could easily be lost on us in the English language. But in the Greek you can see how it would have been unmistakable. Paul was talking about his work using priestly references.

Now isn't that a bit odd?

Isn't this the New Testament?

Well, no. It really isn't that odd. There are a lot of references to priests in the New Testament.

First we see that Jesus is the great High Priest.

Hebrews 2:14-18 (NKJV)

14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Does this strike you with great comfort? What a wonderful truth this is. Christ became **like us** in order to carry out this wonderful ministry **to us**. He was our ultimate high priest to make propitiation for our sins. He carried out the ministry, once and for all, that we desperately needed. And we know that not only was He the priest in this transaction. He **was** also **the sacrifice**. He was the lamb sacrificed for our sin. What a wonder. What an act of mercy and grace by our

great high priest. If we knew nothing else about God, this one fact should be enough to win our loyalty and worship from this moment until we die.

We go on in Hebrews to learn a bit more.

Hebrews 3:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house.

3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house.

We see that our high priest was faithful to God the Father. We see that He carried out the ministry given to Him exactly as He should have.

Then Paul tells us more in I Timothy

1 Timothy 2:5-7 (NKJV)

5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

7 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle--I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying--a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

We see that Christ was mediating between God and man. That is what a priest does. He represents man to God. The word for mediate in the Greek means one who intervenes between two, either in order to **make** or **restore** peace and friendship, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**.

And that is what our great High Priest did for us. He represented us to God.

Now that is not all we know about priests in the New Testament. We find that all believers are priests now.

1 Peter 2:4-5 (NKJV)

4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

We have access to God's presence. We are clothed in righteousness.

And we offer up spiritual sacrifices.

The following is a quote.

R. C. H. Lenski, in his commentary, summarizes the difference between the old and new sacrifices:

“The main task of the Old Testament priests was the offering of material, animal sacrifices, all of which pointed to Christ's great sacrifice to come. These are no longer needed since Christ offered his all-sufficient sacrifice once for all. Now there remain for God's holy priesthood only **the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving**, seeing that **all the treasures of God's grace are now poured out upon us through Christ.**”

The wording in the Greek

“emphasizes the fact that **everything in the relation of the readers to God through Christ is now altogether spiritual.**”

(The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude [reprint; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966], 90)MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1 Peter.

We see here that because all believers are priests, no human needs a human priest in order to access God. That was taken care of by Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholics are wrong to think their so called priests should be called Father. They are wrong to think that their priests are required to represent men to God. We can't speak to their motivations but their theology belittles the work of Christ. It is offensive. Jesus Christ cleared the way for us to reach God through him, without the help of any man. Praise God for this.

Now, with all this being true, what is Paul talking about.

What Paul describes is not a 2 sided illustration. He is not talking about playing some mystical part in mediating between God and man as a priest. He does not carry his metaphor that far.

But he creates a word picture of Paul standing, like a high priest next to the alter. And it is as if he is offering up a grain offering to God. Except in his hands he does not hold up grain. He symbolically holds up the souls of all those people that God's gospel has saved through Paul's ministry. He holds them up to God and we know what God thinks because Paul tells us.

He says

16 that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul is ministering the Gospel of God to people. He is offering the Gentile converts symbolically to God. And the offering is received as being acceptable. The offering is pleasing to God. God likes it. He can receive it exactly as it is. Why?

First, because it has been properly prepared. When a lamb was offered in the Old Testament it had to be offered in a very specific way. No corners could be cut. Blood had to be spilt.

Well the gospel is the proper preparation for a soul to be made acceptable to God. A human first learns that he cannot come to God as he is. He cannot be acceptable to God with his impurities. His sin, the sin that he committed and the sin nature that he was born in must be dealt with. He cannot come to God with that defect.

That is a big problem. Like Mary Friend mentioned in Sunday school a few weeks ago, all of our righteousness is like filthy rags. We can never come to Christ like that. We must come in purity. And that is impossible for us to attain. We need blood to be spilt for us. We need another sacrifice offered.

And the Gospel is the story about that happening. Jesus Christ was the lamb of God, the lamb sacrificed for our sins. Oh praise Christ this morning. It is through Him and what He did that we can come to God. Our garments are washed white. Our sin has been expunged. We are clean. We are clean indeed. We come to Christ in the sinless robes that have been handed to us by Christ himself. We come and we are acceptable. Why? Because of what Christ has done on our behalf. The only thing that is acceptable is what God has done **for us**. The only thing that **has merit** is that which God has done through us. And the only thing that **is good** is what God has done **to us...** in Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ. So we come to Christ through first hearing the message that Paul was ministering, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then God moves on men **with regard to that message** and His calling on a human heart. And what does He do then? He sanctifies us. What does that mean?

He sets us apart as something special for His use.

When you lived with your mom and dad, did your mom have a special set of silverware or dishes that were only used on special occasions? Those items were consecrated. They were sanctified for a special purpose. That is essentially the word used here. Believers are set aside for a special purpose. God takes all of the humans ever created by His hand and he sets some aside. They are the elect. They are chosen for salvation. They are chosen as the ones on whom He will display His amazing grace. And it is the Holy Spirit who sets us apart. We are sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

So Paul first displays his ministry as a priest.

Next he tells us about Paul the preacher.

Paul the preacher

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

**18 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--
19 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.**

Look at how Paul words this. We were talking about this in Sunday School a few weeks ago. The only things that count in this life, the only things we really have to boast about, are not the things that came from us. They are only the things that God has accomplished through us.

When Paul says, therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things that pertain to God, he means just that. Paul can exalt those parts of His ministry where God has exalted Himself. He can make a big deal of them because **they are** a big deal. Notice that Paul never makes a big deal in what a thinker he is or what a speaker he is, or how well trained a theologian he is. In fact, he has a tendency to say.... Now those things I was before I came to Christ.... Now that is just a pile of rubbish. But those things that Christ is doing through Paul, that is a big deal and rightfully so.

We need to have the same attitude about those things that God does through us. Sometimes we think if we make a big deal about what God is doing, we are just somehow blowing our own horn. But that is not true. If it truly is God's work in a person's life and we know for sure that it is, there is no credit due to us and we would be lying to take any of the credit. We need to glorify God for what He is doing. Whether it is through us or through someone else.

**18 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--
19 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 is saying for sure he is not going to act like things that God did apart from Paul were as a result of Paul's work. He isn't going to be like so many Christian organizations that come in after God has worked to claim to be part of what God is doing, knowing that this will increase the donations that are received. No, Paul doesn't need that kind of nonsense, nor will he be party to it.

At the same time, Paul had plenty of success stories. He had plenty of stories to tell about what God **did** accomplish through his ministry.

But look closely at what he says.

in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient--

There are two things to notice here about real and effective ministry.

The first thing is that the minister is not free to just come in, drop the gospel bomb, and leave, thinking that he has a well rounded ministry. There were two parts of Paul's ministry and he was consistent with that his whole life.

There was the "in word" part.

And there was the "in deed" part.

Look at what he tells to his minister trainee- Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:10 (NKJV)

10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance,

1 Timothy 4:15-16 (NKJV)

15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Paul was very clear about this. He was not one who would endorse these tv evangelists who live in mansions far from the people they claim to serve. No. There were two parts to his ministry. What he did. And what he taught. And he never held one out above the other. He knew his own heart. **Preaching it well** does not give us a free pass **to living it badly**. God isn't exactly shorthanded when it comes to people who will accomplish what he wants done. So he isn't going to be like so many businesses, where you accept the faults of a good salesman even though he may only work one day a week.

No, a true minister must watch both **how he lives** and **what he is preaching**. And as he ministers he must focus on the same thing in his disciples. Paul will limit his conversation to only what is true about what he said and what he did. That is all. But with Paul, those things are exemplary.

Look at what Paul says here. He is giving instructions to the elders at Ephesus.

Based on history it must have been a warning they did not heed.

Acts 20:31-35 (NKJV)

31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

32 So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Paul was talking about his ministry. And Paul can speak very boldly about it. He says all you guys need to do is **remember**. If you do, you will remember that for 3 years I worked night and day. I wasn't retreating to my palace and leaving you in charge of fundraising. I wasn't just showing up for speaking engagements. No. I was working hard day and night. We know that Paul worked through the heat of the day teaching. That was a time of the day that no one worked. But Paul did. If anyone ever had the right to speak about his efforts, Paul did. So when Paul talks about "in word and in deed" he is just describing his ministry accurately. But now look at the target he is shooting at.

to make the Gentiles obedient

Notice he does not say, to make the gentiles accept Christ. He does not say, to make the Gentiles go through the church membership class. No. He says to make the Gentiles obedient. Why does he put it that way? I don't think it is complicated at all. Look at what Christ said.

John 14:15 (NKJV)

15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Acts 5:32 (ASV)

32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

You see, you cannot separate loving God from obeying God. You cannot separate receiving Christ as Savior and receiving Christ as Lord. That is a heresy that has sprung up recently. When God calls a person to Himself, He calls that person to obedience. It will not be perfect obedience, any more than it is perfect anything. But there will be a trend in that person's life of submission to the will of God. They will obey more in 2014 than they did in 2013. They will either submit to God's direction or they will receive discipline. And if they are God's child and will not submit, we see evidence in scripture that God will shorten their lives. It is that big of a deal.

Never listen to a person who teaches that a person can be a **believer** but not an **obey-er**. That is not what scripture teaches. And that is not how Paul evaluated his own ministry. He knew that only those who were **obeyers** were true ministry

results. Signers are not results. Confessors are not true results. Obeyers, now they are results with true evidence. You can be confident about them.

Anyone who claims to be a believer and who is actively and knowingly choosing a path they believe to be sinful is in great danger. The danger is that they may be proving their claim to faith to be false. When we start asking the question, if I do this thing that I am planning to do, will I go to hell, we display ourselves in the greatest of dangers. We display a truth about us that is frightening. We show a disregard toward Christ that is reprehensible. The lamb of God, slaughtered for our salvation, and this is our love for Him? That we selfishly cannot give up a path that we know displeases him, dishonors him, and destroys lives? How can the love of God be in us when we think to live in such a way?

We must get serious with ourselves on these issues. Is there a path of sin that you are determined to take? Or that you know you will take under certain circumstances. Believers are obeyers. We need to take action at this point. We need to do whatever we must so we will not dishonor Christ in the presence of His angels in such a way. If we love Him, we will obey Him.

Let's stop here and take up the rest of the text next week, Lord willing.