

---

# The Gospel: God's Will for a Serving People

## Romans 15:7-16:24

*Russ Kennedy*

We must learn the Gospel – for it is:

Good News to a Sinful World  
Good News to a Struggling Believer  
Good News from a Sovereign God.

We must live the Gospel – for it is:

God's Will for a Sanctified People  
God's Will for a Serving People.

All because of *Centrality* and *Glory* of God in the Gospel.

I love John Stott's introduction to this section. Listen to what he writes. (*Romans*, p.377)

The great exposition (chapters 1-11) and the great exhortation (chapters 12:1-15:6) are over. Paul's readers may well be thinking that his two benedictions are the conclusion of his letter. But he has not finished yet. He intends to return to the question of his relations with the Roman church, which he began to open up earlier (1:8-13). He wants to take them into his confidence about the salient characteristics of his ministry, which will throw light for them on why he has not yet visited them and his plan to do so soon.

But first he wonders whether they may have been offended by the fact, contents or tone of his letter. Has he been presumptuous to address a church he did not found and has never visited? Has he given the impression that he regards their Christianity as defective and immature? Has he been too outspoken? The apostle seems to be experiencing a twinge of apprehension about how his letter will be received. If so, the rest of it will disarm and reassure them. He writes very personally (maintaining an 'I-you' directness throughout), affectionately and candidly. He opens his heart to them about the past, present and future of his ministry, he asks humbly for their prayers and he sends them many greetings. In these ways he gives us insight into the outworking of God's providence in his life and work.

## The Explanation of Ministry for the Gentiles

**15:7-13**

Christ has welcomed Jew and Gentile for the glory of God. God is magnified when His mercy and call by grace extends to Jew and Gentile. That statement in verse 7 than brings us to an explanatory word.

### The Purposes of Christ's Servanthood

**(v.8-9)**

Paul could see that there remained a question in the mind of the Jews. "If the Messiah was to be a King, how could he be a reviled servant?" Rather than this undermining the truthfulness of God in the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, it serves to show how truthful God really is. Christ glorifies God, demonstrating God's truthfulness so that the promises to the patriarchs are confirmed. He fulfills those promises, not in the limited way they expected, but in the greater and more glorious ways Paul has unpacked in Romans, as well as in Galatians and Ephesians. Thus, the Gentiles receive his mercy and respond with praise.

The point here is clear: it is not that redemptive history is about the Jews alone or about separate and never-to-be-confused purposes for Jew and Gentile, but that God's promises

had a wideness that was promised and prophesied so that saving mercy is to Jew and Gentile.

### **The Proof from Scripture**

**(v.9-12)**

Where does Paul get the confidence to assert that? From this cluster of texts he cites. For the sake of time, we won't go back and read the surrounding context this morning – in your own study, do that to see the richness of what Paul is doing here. However, do observe the progression. In verse 9, David will praise God *among* the Gentiles. In verse 10, the Gentiles are to rejoice *with* God's people. All the Gentiles are *commanded* to praise God for His faithfulness, verse 11 citing Psalm 117:1. Finally, the Root of Jesse arises *to rule over* and *be hoped in* by the Gentiles, citing Isaiah 11:10.

I cannot pass by that the Messiah who will come (from Isaiah's perspective) is the root of Jesse. Isn't it true that roots support the trunk and branches – that roots preceded the plant? So how can Christ be the root of Jesse's son? Is it merely because He is eternal and precedes David in existence? I think not. In other words, Jesus is not the King because David was the King – no, David is a King on a throne because Jesus will be the King on that throne. So here the glory of what is *yet in the future* is the source of minor and reflected glories all the way to back David.

### **The Prayer for Joyful Hope**

**(v.13)**

Since we have a faithful and truthful God, then this prayer focuses on joy and peace in *believing* that yields by the Spirit's power, an abounding hope. Paul prays that this is so. Once gain, we are brought face to face with the startlingly spiritual aspect of Paul's praying.

When our Hopes are on someone or something else, we are doomed to unhappiness and turmoil and ever-increasing discouragement and despair. Having all of the Bible to believe in an obeying way, what joy and peace comes when we anchor our hope in the God of hope. We will have therefore an abounding hope by the power of God's Spirit moving through the Word believed.

May this be so for you as well.

### **The Example of Ministry in the Gospel**

**15:14-33**

If the Gentiles are to truly become the people of God, what kind of ministry will bring that about? Paul models three essential elements of a ministry in the gospel aimed to bring the Gentiles as well as the Jews to praise God all over the world.

### **Shaped by Purpose**

**(v.14-21)**

<sup>14</sup> I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. <sup>15</sup> But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. <sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedi-

ence—by word and deed,<sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;<sup>20</sup> and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation,<sup>21</sup> but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”

Paul models a ministry that aims to Finish (v.14-19). His purposes in life and ministry give him a sense of having fulfilled what God had for him. So, while he is confident in their ability to minister to one another (v.14), he is concerned to expound on the gospel (v.15) so that his ministry will be acceptable to God (v.16) and accomplished by God’s power (v.17-18).

Paul’s philosophy of ministry here is so evident. It is a ministry by enabling grace (v.15b). It is a ministry that serves God (v.16a). It is a ministry that has a God-defined aim and target – *to the Gentiles* (v.16b). It is a ministry in the gospel that has a priestly metaphor – that is, he wants the offering of the Gentiles to meet the standard so that it will be accepted and approved by God (v.16b). It is a ministry to be proud of, but only in Christ – therefore, it requires humility. It is a ministry in which he works because God is working through him (v.18), even the working of miracles as an apostle (v.19). While much of this is unique to Paul’s apostolic ministry, many of these have application to evangelists and missionaries and to us as well.

Paul models a ministry that aims for Foundations (v.20-21). He is an apostle who is laying foundations in terms of the *what* of his ministry, the gospel and the Scriptures and in terms of the *where* of his ministry. He aims to be pioneering in ministry – to go where others have not yet gone and bring the gospel to those who have not heard. He then takes his purpose as an apostle and his aim in ministry and can speak in terms of *ambition*. My purpose becomes what I pursue.

I want to highlight the importance of purpose for life and ministry. Since coming to understand and define God’s purpose for my life, both in the universals that all of us share and in the particulars of my life, there has been a joy and satisfaction that is hard to describe. I would encourage each of you to pray over and reflect on God’s providence in your life and begin to articulate God’s purpose for you.

## **Implemented with Planning**

**(v.22-29)**

The purposes of our ministry work are implemented practically through planning.

<sup>22</sup> This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. <sup>23</sup> But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, <sup>24</sup> I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. <sup>25</sup> At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. <sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. <sup>28</sup> When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has

been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.<sup>29</sup> I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Paul lays out some amazing plans for his ministry. He plans a trip to Rome (v.23-24), to Jerusalem (v.25-27) and then to Spain (v.28-29).

Paul's planning has its HOPES (v.22-24). Paul has great hopes to come to Rome that have been hindered. So there is very real since in which we plan along the track of our purposes with real hopes and longings. Planning is as much about what we want and desire as it is about what we think and describe.

Paul's planning prioritizes in its OUGHTS (v.25-27). He has a responsibility to carry the offering for the church at Jerusalem to them. He sees the fulfilling of the Gentile church's obligations in this matter as a governing priority, even over his hopes. This expression of unity and solidarity and care for the poor saints in Jerusalem is a way that his mission to the Gentiles is fulfilled as they sacrificially fulfill their spiritual and material debt to Jews. So our planning of ministry towards purposes must identify responsibilities and obligations, prioritizing on them.

Paul's planning moves in its BLESSINGS (v.28-29). The word for blessing here is literally "good word". The blessing here is in the sense of the trip will be pleasing to God so that He will prosper and reward it. God's approving and enabling blessing will be on ministry as we move forward with an emphasis on our priorities, and our hopes and desires are realistic and flexible.

## **Relies on Prayer**

**(v.30-33)**

Our lives and ministries must be shaped by clear, Biblically informed purpose statements, careful and flexible planning that relies on partnerships in prayer.

<sup>30</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,<sup>31</sup> that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,<sup>32</sup> so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.<sup>33</sup> May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

They strive together in a partnership (v.30). Paul appeals for their partnership in the struggle of ministry through prayer. They may not be together now, but they can still be involved in the work now.

They pray for his Safety and Service (v.31). The partnership in prayer then identifies the real needs to be prayed over. He wants them to pray for protection from unbelievers, for being accepted in his ministry and then, if God wills, that he will be able to come to them.

Their prayer brings a mutual Serving (v.32-33). Finally, relying on prayer means that we value serving others to the degree that being with people in ministry energizes and refreshes us.

## The Exhortations to Ministry of Grace

16:1-24

Paul seems to be having trouble closing this book. So much so that commentators fall all over themselves trying to explain it. Some over focus on the human element and then deny that what is here ought to be here. Yet, we do this all the time with our own letters. You write it, close it with your signature and then you add a PS – a postscript. Just because these may be postscripts – after all it is a human author giving the book by dictation – they are supposed to be here because there is the Divine Author, the Holy Spirit who carries Paul along even in the post scripts.

### Welcome in a Worthy Way

(v.1-16)

This large section shows Paul's love for people. In fact, it is staggering that he knows all these people when he has never been to the church there. It is very important for us to ponder the fact that most of the New Testament letters are full of people – to people, for people and about people. To frame this in a bit – I think of this as Help and Hello.

### Help for Others

(v.1-2)

Paul begins this people section by commending the lady who would be carrying the letter to them.

<sup>1</sup> I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, <sup>2</sup> that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

They were to receive her and to sustain her by meeting her needs. Paul indicates that she is a Christian sister (v.1a), the church's servant (v.1b), sent on a mission (v.2a), sustained and supplied others needs (v.2b). In agreement with many commentators, I am of the strong opinion that Phoebe was a deacon. I get that from the fact that she is not just a servant, but also a Servant of the church at Cenchreae.

### Hello to Others

(v.3-16)

Paul's expects us to be open to one another. Notice the themes that intertwine these greetings of saved and serving.

<sup>3</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. <sup>5</sup> Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. <sup>6</sup> Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. <sup>7</sup> Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. <sup>8</sup> Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. <sup>10</sup> Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. <sup>11</sup> Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. <sup>12</sup> Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. <sup>14</sup> Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. <sup>15</sup> Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. <sup>16</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

I cannot go through each one of these and identify who they are. We do find Priscilla and Aquila once again in the thick of risky ministry for the sake of the gospel and the glory of Christ. Epaphroditus was the first one saved in Asia. There are several names here that come from families who would have been famous in that day. And we meet some who were saved before Paul, work hard in the church, were imprisoned, were well known to the Apostles (or possibly were outstanding missionaries), one who is identified as being elect or chosen.

So all of these individuals are to greet one another. And so are the churches. So Paul points us to a network of personal and corporate relationships spread all over the known world. This ought to encourage us to value relationships, to cultivate hospitality, to love people and seek to know many. While Paul encourages a holy kiss of greeting, we may and probably ought to express our love and acceptance to others through the cultural forms of our day.

I want you to see a couple of important things through this section. First, there is an enormous diversity of people – slaves, freedmen, rich, poor, politicians and bureaucrats. There are a large number of women who are commended as faithful and hard working. Yet, they are all one for they are the saved and serving.

### **Warning against Divisive People**

**(v.17-20)**

Many find this transition from acceptance to admonition to abrupt. But the unity and diversity of the church has to be guarded by careful watchfulness for those who divide the church. While we are open to receive people whose convictions of practice are different and welcome saved and serving people, we must hold true to doctrine.

<sup>17</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. <sup>18</sup> For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. <sup>19</sup> For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. <sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The warning opens with a COMMAND (v.17). The appeal is to be watchful for people who are harmful in the church. We need to be on the alert for those who do two things: cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to what we have learned from the apostles in the Scriptures. There is an objective standard that our unity is anchored to and defined by. While loving people, we must be loyal to truth. What is commanded is separation – we must avoid them. Now I think this is both internally and externally. Our faith is not strengthened by error. So there is little positive value in listening, watching or reading that which is contrary to the sound doctrine of the Bible and the church. Avoid it.

Paul heightens his warning by indicating some CHARACTERISTICS (v.18) of this kind of people. They tend to be people who not only believe wrong (v.17), but who are mastered and driven by their desires, by what they want and crave. So the problem with divisive people is a heart issue – it is in what they believe and in what they want. This is in line with most of the New Testament. Paul connects wrong doctrine with corrupt desires. The great danger here is in their ability to deceive. They often are kind, winsome people who are elo-

quent, articulate and persuasive. And we are very vulnerable, particularly when we are naïve in doctrine and deception.

In this context, Paul expresses a CONCERN (v.19) for them. They have a reputation for obedience. Paul rejoices in that reputation. But, he wants them, as J.B. Phillips puts it, “to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil.” So he is calling for alertness in the midst of a lack of sophistication about evil.

Finally, Paul assures them with strong affirmations of his CONFIDENCE (v.20) in God’s ultimate victory. There is a future victory in the midst of a present provision. Until Satan is crushed under their feet, there is enabling grace from our Lord Jesus Christ now. Now look at something – the God of peace crushes Satan. So peace is not the absence of conflict – it is the presence of God and His power to bring about the eschatological victory.

Stott detects three, and I will add one, valuable tests to apply to different systems of doctrine and ethics, and to those who teach, preach and write them. Is it (a) Biblical, (b) Christological, (c) moral and (d) eschatological? Does it agree with Scriptures? Does it pursue and praise Christ? Does it lead to goodness and holiness? Does it rely on grace now in view of a future victory?

### **Workers in Present Ministry**

**(v.21-22)**

That brings us then to the final postscript where he sends messages from his co-workers in ministry.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. <sup>22</sup> I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

His co-laborers, his secretary and his host all send their greetings to the church at Rome. So he is surrounded by Jewish converts committed to ministry. He has someone who serves him in his poor eyesight by writing down the letter as he dictates. And he has a host whose open heart and home and hospitality free Paul for more effective ministry.

---

## Reflect and Respond

The gospel then is God's will for a serving people.

Let us see our MISSION as one of calling all people to glorify God in Christ by believing and bowing to Him.

Let us be a people who follow Paul's MODEL of ministry - to be shaped by purpose implemented by planning, all the while relying on prayer.

Let us be a people who MINISTER in grace - as we welcome the saved and the serving. May we cultivate an deep openness to people.

Let us be a people who love God through the MESSAGE- that is, the doctrine we believe. May we be alert and watchful to those who would divide and set obstacles contrary to what we believe and avoid them.

Let us look and long and lean toward the soon coming Day when the enemy of our souls will be CRUSHED!

May this grace of God for your loving and living magnify Christ, here, in our community and all over the world.