

# Romans 15:14-33

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[ 0 : 00 ] People often think of Romans as 1-8, really important, vital, and 9-11, quite important but difficult, 12 onwards, well just practical instructions.

! If you look at the commentaries, and you look at the amount of space they devote from 1-8, and then 9-11, and then 12-16, you'll notice kind of ever-decreasing circles.

However, I think that's a real mistake, because Romans 12-16 shows the practical outworking of Romans 1-11.

And what you find in these chapters particularly is how that gospel, which Paul has explained, works itself out in the peace and the unity of a local church family. It's, if you like, the relational lifestyle of the gospel.

Now why is this so important? It's so important because of this. The Church of Jesus Christ is a living demonstration. The Church of Jesus Christ is a living demonstration that the good news of the gospel is true.

[ 1 : 09 ] And so what we saw last week is we go on accepting one another as brothers and sisters in the Christian church, because God has accepted us.

The strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the black and the white, the Jew and the Gentile, in the Church of Jesus Christ, accept one another because God has accepted us.

Christ did not please himself. He became a servant to fulfil God's purposes. And so we do not serve ourselves.

And we have joy and peace in the power of the Spirit and glorious hope to the future. That is Romans 14-13 and 14. Because we belong to Christ, as a Christian we are not to please ourselves. We are not to judge, we are not to despise one another, we are not to condemn, but we are to serve the Christ who served us. And the way we do that is by making every effort to do what leads to peace and to build one another up.

[ 2 : 11 ] Now that's where we've got to. When we come to Romans 15, Paul has been a Jewish bigot. And he could hardly have imagined, a few years earlier, that he would be writing with such warmth to a Gentile community that he'd never met.

And that in itself is the most extraordinary phenomenon. So just have a look at verse 14. Look at what he says in verse 14. He says, 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. But on some points I've written to you very boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given to me by God. I'm meant to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. So what he's saying there is that they need to be reminded of what they already knew.

And that really is key to understanding the New Testament. How do we live the Christian life? We live the Christian life by being reminded of what we already know. That is always the apostolic priority. To tell you what you already know.

Because we know that if it's not preserved, if it's not practiced, it will disappear. So he says to the church, just to see, from Romans 12 to the end of the book, I want you to be practicing the gospel.

[ 3 : 34 ] He says, I'm very much aware of your goodness and I'm very much aware of your knowledge. And I've written these things so that you will be competent. Can you see it in verse 14? To instruct one another. You know the gospel.

But actually you need to be reminded of it. And that is my task as an apostle to do that, says Paul. And that's why it's so important. Because it is the gospel lifestyle of the church that authenticates the gospel message you proclaim.

That if the church want to see what God is like, if the church want to see what the gospel is like, where do they look? They look at the church corporate. The church is the living demonstration of

the power of God to save and to rescue.

And that's why he's been so interested, isn't he? To say that Jews and Gentiles, you've been brought together. You are one in your sin. You are one in your rescue. You are one. And through that gospel in these chapters, they have to be sanctified and consecrated.

Now that grace of God has appeared and equipped Paul, verse 16, as a minister of Christ Jesus. To the Gentiles. And he's got that priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God.

[ 4 : 48 ] It's quite an interesting word at the start of verse 16. The word minister. It's the word that we get in English. Liturgy is the word we get from that. It's not the usual deacon. It's not the usual servant word.

It means really public servant. And so Paul is saying, God has called me by his grace to be a public servant of this gospel and Christ Jesus. But the emphasis falls in that verse, in verse 16, on the Gentiles.

So in these verses where Paul reflects on what he's been doing for these last number of years. Where he reflects on his ministry up to this point. And he starts to share his plans to visit them on his way to Spain.

What you have is you have an insight into the Apostle Paul's heart. And we have an insight into what were the Apostle Paul's priorities. And I don't think there's anything more important for us to grasp.

What were the priorities of that apostolic ministry? It seems to me, in our day in generation, we as Christians are very confused about what a gospel lifestyle looks like.

[ 5 : 55 ] What we see in the New Testament is the gospel reality is proved by a revolutionary lifestyle of those who believe it. And if the church no longer demonstrates that revolutionary lifestyle, it's because the church has stopped believing the gospel.

It may be a religious club, but it is certainly no longer a New Testament church. And Paul wants the Roman Christians, and you and I this afternoon, to be absolutely, absolutely sure what motivated him.

And what must motivate them and us. Two simple questions. What was Paul working for? And how was it accomplished? What was Paul working for? Now, I don't know whether you realise what Donald read to us so well.

The amazing things, what he's saying here. The miraculous and revolutionary change that are the products of the gospel. And the touchstone of his ministry.

This is how he knows gospel work is being done. Verse 16, can you see that? I want you to see, first of all, that he is working for outsiders to become acceptable.

[ 7 : 04 ] He's working for outsiders to become acceptable. He says, listen to me. God has given me the priestly duty, the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offerings of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

That is an amazing statement. Why is that an amazing statement? Because that statement is full, isn't it? Just look at it, of Old Testament language.

Can you see it? Priestly service. Offering that is acceptable. Sanctified. Set apart.

It speaks, does it, of worship in the temple. It speaks of priestly duties. It speaks of offerings that are accepted and sanctified of an aroma that is pleasing to the Lord, if you've read Leviticus.

And all of that is Old Testament vocabulary. Sons of Aaron had to produce sacrificial offerings that were acquired by the Lord to be acceptable by the Lord.

[ 8 : 07 ] It's a technical term. They had to be sanctified. They had to be consecrated. But you will know, won't you, if you know your Old Testament law, look at verse 16.

It speaks about Gentiles. Gentiles were not allowed to sacrifice. They were not allowed into the Holy of Holies. They were not allowed into the outer court.

They were only allowed into the outer court of the Gentiles. There was a massive no-entry sign. Slapped on the temple. They were forced to remain outside.

They were unable to draw near. Non-Jews couldn't get into the temple. They were unacceptable to God. But now, through Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Christ died for you, Romans 5, 6, 8. While you were still sinners. While we were enemies of God. Because of his atoning sacrifice, the barrier has been removed.

[ 9 : 04 ] And so the Apostle Paul is able to proclaim the good news far and wide. Look at verse 21. But as it is written, those who have never been told of him will see.

And those who have never heard will understand. That's been fulfilled. His commission, from verse 16, is to present redeemed Gentiles as a holy, acceptable offering to God.

Set apart for God by his Holy Spirit living within. The outsiders have become acceptable. And that is why he says, doesn't he, in this part of the letter, he says, You make sure that you accept one another as God has accepted you.

You were on the outside, but God has brought you right into the throne room of heaven. And so we boldly come to the throne of God. We come to the holiest place of all through the blood of Jesus. How therefore can you refuse to accept others who similarly have been brought in? Of course, this is what I've been working for. This is my aim in life.

[10:12] All the time, I proclaim the gospel to those who are outsiders. To those who are not Jews. That they will recognize that this amazing revolution has taken place. They've been made acceptable to God.

That's his priestly duty. And the second thing, not only the outsiders become acceptable, but look at verse 18. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience.

By word and deed. Outsiders become acceptable. Motivation number one. The lawless become disobedient. Do you remember Romans 1 to 4?

We were told that the non-Jews, the Gentiles, they did not have the law of God. They did not receive the covenant law from God as the people of Israel have.

They didn't have that privilege. And yet Paul says, doesn't it, in Romans 1 to 4, We are all, whether they're Jew or Gentile, we are equally culpable before God. Because all of us have suppressed, we've pushed down the truth of God's eternal power and divine nature.

[11:15] In order to serve creative things rather than the creator. We exchange the truth of God that we see all around us, that there is a God out there who is glorious and who is worthy of worship.

We exchange the glory of God in general revelation for a life of lawlessness. And that's true of all. But look at this gospel miracle.

The Gentiles who are brought in, the outsiders who are brought inside, they are led, verse 18, to obedience by word and deed. Now that is at the heart of Paul's apostolic ministry.

On the mark of its reality, the mark of reality of faith, that the Jews and the Gentiles who all believe in the Lord Jesus, the proof of that is in their obedience.

Let's look at how that works. Let me read to you just from 1626. I want you to see that this is a summary, really, of the book of Romans. So in the middle of that verse, he says about what has been disclosed, has been made known to all the nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.

[12:25] Same in the gospel. If you go right to the start of the gospel, Romans chapter 1 and verse 5, Paul says, through whom we, that's the apostles, have received grace and apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

Among all the nations. The letter ends that way, and the letter begins that way. Right at the start and right at the end, he's saying, and he's underlining it, my great purpose is to bring the Gentiles to obedience.

So let's try and bring this today. How do you know that the gospel is working? How do you know the gospel is working in your life and in the life of your church? How do you know that it's the genuine gospel?

And the answer is that when Gentiles from the outside trust in the Lord Jesus, they are made acceptable and they obey.

When their lives are transformed, that is how you know the gospel is working. And the mark of being outsiders who've been accepted is daily detailed obedience. It is the lifestyle of repentance and faith.

[13:35] And that's how we know that we're gospel people. Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commands. And that's what Paul has been working for all the time.

They are the marks of apostolic authenticity. He is a minister, he is a public servant, and he has a priestly duty. Literally, verse 17 reads, I have boasting in Christ Jesus in the things in relation to God.

It's all about Paul, and it's all about his authority, it's about Christ. He is the focus, it's there again in verse 18. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience.

Paul realises he is the vital channel, he is unique, he is the apostle to the Gentiles. He is the one commissioned by grace. So he doesn't underplay his role. He says, Christ has accomplished this through me in leading Gentiles to obey God.

There's no false modesty. He recognises what God has done through him. God is the one who has worked through him. But he doesn't overplay his role either. Look at verse 19. By the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.

[ 14 : 49 ] So that is why Paul has given his life as a service to the gospel. Because he wants to see the outsider become the insider. And he wants those transformed insiders to be obedient.

Jim Elliot, the martyr from the 1950s, little 60s, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. And Paul has been giving his life in that gospel work because he recognises that is his commission under God.

And God has chosen him through which this amazing miracle happens. So the outsiders become acceptable. The law has become disobedient. And here's the second question. How is that accomplished?

How does that happen? And I think we're over familiar with the story. I think we're too over familiar with this great miracle that swept the gospel onto Rome city after city after city.

How it rampaged the gospel through the ancient world in those first years of Christianity of that first century. The pagan status quo was threatened by the gospel.

[ 15 : 53 ] It's so important that we realise that. That even the imperial cult, the imperial cult which seemed so solid and impenetrable was undermined by the good news of sins forgiven and peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Now the situation is actually quite similar to the New Testament time here in our day. It is, if you go through Europe and in the UK, it is difficult to establish and difficult to maintain a gospel witness.

And it's why Paul says, isn't he, he's so careful to say, don't destroy that gospel witness over things like food and secondary things. And that's why as a church working hard on our priorities, it's essential for church life that we keep the gospel at the centre.

Now what service does this gospel demand? There's three works of how the work gets done in this passage, I think. Firstly, the work gets done, outsiders get brought into the insiders, and insiders become obedient by three things.

Number one, by the proclamation of the gospel message. By the proclamation of the gospel message. Of God's gospel. It is unmistakably clear, and yet it's often overlooked in practice.

[ 17 : 05 ] Look at verse 16. Do you see what it says? The priestly duty, the priestly service, of the gospel of God. Look at verse 19.

By the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and all the way round to Elysium, I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ. And thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel.

So unless this full gospel, which he has taught us through Romans, is proclaimed, as widely as possible, nothing has changed. And we must not just have that as a conviction in our heads, but the motivation in our lives.

The gospel must be the heartbeat of our churches. The hardest thing is to keep the message that we've looked up in Romans at the heart of church life. And in our personal lives.

And in our praying. And in our giving. And in our sharing of the gospel. How we proclaim the gospel of God by what you and I say and do day by day that the gospel spreads.

[ 18 : 14 ] The priority of the gospel. Living sacrificial life so that the gospel gets out. So that doesn't mean just speaking verbally or preaching.

We all know, don't we, that there's a whole undergirding that enables gospel work to happen. But we must be involved to the limit of our abilities. Word ministry, of course. But for a word ministry to happen, for somebody to be able to proclaim the gospel, there are a whole load of serving ministries that must take place to undergird that.

And so we give our time and our energy and our money. We do it in mundane ways. We put out the chairs. We welcome people. We clean up after meetings.

We give lifts to folk. We serve tea and coffee. It's all gospel work. Because we do that because we want the gospel to go out. I hope we're committed to its proclamation through our lips. But in all sorts of ways, in different ways, we will do that in our lives. We will open up our homes. And we'll need all sorts of initiatives to do that. If we are going to plant and support new congregations, if we will raise up an army of new workers and train a generation of preachers, because we were on the outside, but now we've been brought into the inside and we want others to know that.

[ 19 : 40 ] And we want to obey God because we love Him. And the heart of God is that the nations would come to know Him and obey Him. And so let me encourage you.

Let me encourage you in the gospel work you're doing with your friends and with your family. Let me encourage you in your conversations at work, in your giving, in your serving. And you might not think you're doing very much at all, but actually you are because you're enabling gospel work to get done.

Keep on keeping on. And let me challenge you, are there other ways? By your giving, by your praying, by your time, by your words, you can help this gospel of God go forward.

It goes forward by the proclamation of God's gospel. Secondly, it's by the power of God's Spirit. Do you see how that comes through in verses 18 and 19? For I will not venture to speak anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.

I will not venture to speak of anything but what Christ has accomplished through me. And how has Christ done that? By what I've said and done. And how have you done that, Paul? Well, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.

[ 20 : 57 ] Now his apostolic ministry was accredited by these signs and miracles. That as the gospel spread in the Gentile world, the ministry was affirmed by God.

And the ministry of Jesus was accredited by God in this way. Paul told that to the crowd in Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2. And Hebrews says God testifies to the gospel by signs and wonders and various miracles.

They are supremely the signs of a true apostle. And just as the apostles were the foundation gift of God to the church, so the signs confirmed their authority from God.

They are the foundation of the church. They don't exist now. Let me quote you from John Scott when he says that is not to deny that God can perform miracles today, for it would be ludicrous to impose limitations on the creator of the universe.

But it is rather to acknowledge that there the miracles and signs and wonders chief purpose was to authenticate their unique ministry of the apostles. All this was God's work and he did it through faithful and obedient servants who relied on his sovereign power.

[ 22 : 12 ] you are not an apostle. There are no apostles today. There are no witnesses of the risen Christ. The foundation of the Christian church thankfully has been laid by the apostles and the prophets.

So what is the message for us? Well the message for us is that we too rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Signs and wonders are given to confirm the apostles' ministries.

but we proclaim their gospel. We point out we point to the evidence that God authenticated it in Jesus and the miracles of his ministry and in the early church.

We are not here to perform signs and wonders. We are here to proclaim the gospel of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. But we do need the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the glorious thing is that the New Testament teaches us that when the gospel is proclaimed there the Spirit is always at work. The Holy Spirit is committed to the gospel of God.

[ 23 : 19 ] Through the proclamation of the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit and the last thing that is accomplished one of the tasks the outsiders being brought in the lawless becoming obedient that is accomplished by the passion of God's servant.

Look with me at the second part of verse 19. It says by the power of signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God so that from Jerusalem and all the way round to Elyrisium I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

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. What you've got there is you've got basically a decade of passionate gospel work summarised in two verses.

It starts from Jerusalem goes up to Syria and Antioch across to Asia and Asia to Massage and near down to Achaia in the south of Greece across to Elyrisium in the Adriatic back across the sea to Jerusalem.

It's a great circle of gospel ministry that Paul is involved in. And he says I have been proclaiming the gospel of Christ and it's always been my ambition. Look at the passion of verse 20. My ambition to preach the gospel not where Christ has already been named lest I build on someone else's foundation.

[ 24 : 29 ] Paul had a distinct call from God a unique call from God to keep on planting new churches in the Gentile cities and then to move on.

He looked for un-evangelised areas so that those who've not been told about him would see and those who've not heard would understand. That's a quote isn't it from the book of Isaiah.

He says in verse 22 this is the reason why I've often been hindered from seeing you. I've been so busy. I would have come to Rome but I've been so busy with my pioneer evangelism.

And so now he says verse 23 the work has been done and I'm off to Spain and I'll drop in on the way but I'm not going to stay. And I want to say to you I find that a tremendous rebuke.

I find that a tremendous rebuke because it's so easy for me to settle. And it's so easy for us as churches to lose our edge. And it's so easy to drift into a comfortable lifestyle that services the church machinery and doesn't really care very much for a lost world.

[ 25 : 37 ] It's a service that is passionate and is urgent. He is under an obligation and so are we as Christ's church. The gospel is all about a God who brings outsiders in who makes lawless people obedient and who brings lawless people home and who brings lost people home.

That is God's heart in the gospel. And Romans 15 calls you and I and our churches to rededicate ourselves to it. Let's pray.