

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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3/29/09

Romans 15:14-21 “Ministering the Gospel”

Intro. I read the story of a lady who took a course in first aid. They were having testimonials about first aid, and she stood up and said, “I want to give a testimony. The other day out in front of my house there was an automobile accident. An old man driving his car lost control, went over the curb, and hit an oak tree head-on. He was thrown out into the street. His skull was fractured, he had compound fractures in his limbs, and he was pumping his life’s blood out on the asphalt. It was so horrible, but I remembered my first aid. I remembered if I would put my head between my knees I wouldn’t faint.”¹

I wonder how many of us are taking that kind of approach as we watch people wrecking and ruining their lives on their way to a devil’s hell. Instead of going out and helping them, we seek our own comfort & well-being, and look the other way.

The apostle Paul was not like that. He had a tireless passion for winning lost souls to faith in Jesus Christ. He shared his passion in the introduction of this letter (1:16), and now as he nears the conclusion, he gives some reasons for writing this epistle (vv. 14, 15a, 30-32), which included to fulfill his missionary objective. As he shared the gospel message in the main body of this letter, he do doubt hoped that some who heard or read the letter would be saved. He also hoped that the church in Rome would help him as he stopped in Rome on his way to the western regions of the Empire.

Paul was interested in every soul in the world. He loved the lost for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ and sought to lead them into the saving truth of the gospel. He was certainly an example for us today. Our text today tells us how we can be more like Paul in winning others to Christ. That is the main thrust of my message today. I want to use this text of Scripture to challenge believers to move out of our comfort zone, and become more involved in the great saving work of God in the world.

Now if you are going to accept the challenge, you need to understand first of all:

I. THE REQUIREMENTS OF BEING A WITNESS

If we are going to share the Gospel effectively, there are certain requirements we should meet. Of course, the first requirement for being a witness is that we:

A. Share the Gospel – Though many want to be content with being a life-witness, we should realize that people still need to hear or read the Gospel message in order to be saved. Paul had previously stated in Romans 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” And here in this text of Scripture Paul talked about sharing the Gospel several times. For example, in v.16 we see as a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles Paul was “ministering the gospel of God....” Then in the last of v.19 he said, “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” Then he went on the say in v.20, “And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel....” Paul knew his ministry was incomplete unless he actually shared the good news of Jesus Christ with people.

What is the gospel, the good new of Jesus Christ? [Give brief summary].

¹ Told by the late Adrian Rogers, former pastor at Bellevue Baptist Church.

We must continue to share the good news of Jesus Christ today. Don't assume that people know the gospel message. I would dare say that most in our country today have not heard a clear presentation of the gospel message. Some have heard very little about Jesus. We need to get the gospel message outside the walls of our church, and out into the community.

Some of you feel inadequate to share the gospel. So I would make an appeal to be trained in how to be a witness. I commend those of you who have attended our "Way of the Master" training on Wednesday or Friday nights. Now that's it's over, keep up with it. Keep reviewing what you have learned. When we offer this course again, I hope others of you will take it.

Paul's approach to winning people to faith in Christ was not limited to words. He also indicated that our lives are to be a witness for Christ. And so a second requirement is this:

B. Be an Example of the Transforming Power of the Gospel – Notice in the last of v.18 he mentioned both "word and deed." True Christianity is not just talk. He went on to talk about the power of God demonstrated in apostolic signs and wonders (v.19a), and in the transformed lives of the followers of Christ. He mentioned in the last of v.18 that one effect of the saving gospel was "to make the Gentiles obedient." They went from living sinful lives to living lives in obedience to Christ, beginning with His command to love. People need to see the power of the gospel.

To a large degree, this is the way it was with the Roman Christians. Paul begins this text with a fine compliment for their Christian lives. He says in v.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." Notice that they were now "full of goodness." These people been born of the Spirit, who fills the believing heart with divine goodness, which is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Kindness & goodness are also expressions of love. How we need Christians who, like Dorcas, are "full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36). What a Christian she was! Christ commanded, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16).

When we lack goodness it is a bad witness for the Lord. After examining the paltry tips left by a church group, their waitress was not pleased. Looking toward the table of another waitress, she grumbled, "These people come in with the 10 Commandments and a ten-dollar bill, and they don't break any of them!"²

Furthermore, to be an effective witness for the Lord, you need to:

C. Learn God's Word – Another quality these Roman believers had acquired was that they were now "able also to admonish one another." We need to admonish or warn people as we witness to them. But in order to be able to admonish & witness to others, v.14 also indicates that you to be filled with the knowledge of God & His Word. You see, in the original Greek, Paul indicates that being filled with knowledge is a prior condition to being filled with goodness and able to admonish.³ So to be an effective witness for Jesus, you need to read, study, and learn the Word of God. You are doing that right now is you're really listening. Keep it up. But you need more. Read the Bible on your own. Study the Bible in a small group, such as Sunday School.

D. Depend Upon the Lord – *You* cannot win a soul to Jesus. Intellectual arguments alone will not bring about a true conversion. We can only witness & win someone to Christ by God's enabling grace. If you are going to have the thrill of leading someone to Christ, you must depend upon the Lord. Notice in the last of v.15 that Paul was able to share God's Word "because of the

² Elzena Arguello, *Readers' Digest*, 1/09, p.181.

³ It is literally, "having been filled" (perfect passive participle).

grace given to me by God.” Likewise, Paul said in Eph. 3:8, “this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Grace was given to the end that he might be the minister of Christ to the Gentiles. Also, we can witness only with the help of divine enablement. In winning multitudes of souls to Christ, it is not what Paul has done but what “Christ has...accomplished through me” (v.18). Furthermore, v.19 indicates that he preached “by the power of the Spirit of God.” Paul realized that his effectiveness in winning thousands of people to Christ was due to the Lord. He said in 1 Cor. 2:4, “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” He understood that if people were going to be won to the Lord, it must be by the power of the Spirit of God. Then in 1 Thess. 1:5 he said, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” This verse summarizes what I have been talking about. To be an effective witness, we need to share the Word of God, rely upon the power of the Spirit, and live a winsome Christian life. In 1 Thess. 2:13 he spoke of “the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” Only this combination of the Word and the Spirit can produce faith (Rom. 10:17), give eternal life (1 Pet. 1:23), and bring about new birth (Jas. 1:18). God has never promised to bless eloquence, logic, charm, or any human attainment. Instead He promises to prosper His Word as He enables us, so that all is of Him, through Him and for Him. It is characteristic to intimate his dependence upon the Holy Spirit whenever he refers to the saving effects of the gospel.

This means that we need to pray. Pray that God will give you boldness and enable you. Pray that God will open the heart of the sinner, and enable them to repent & believe the Gospel. Do not trust in your own ability to persuade, but trust in God.

Now I realize that we all need motivation to leave our comfort zone, and become a witness for Christ. So let’s move on from the requirements of being a witness to:

II. THE REASONS FOR WITNESSING

When we consider why we should witness, we tend to think first of the human need. Souls without Christ *are* lost, and in danger of the eternal judgment of God. But Paul doesn’t begin there. He begins with the Lord. Indeed, one reason for witnessing is this:

A. It Fulfills a Vital Ministry *unto* the Lord – Paul says in v.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.” These clauses are full of the language of worship. When he calls himself a “minister” (*leitourgos*), he is speaking of a minister of worship, as in the temple. Also, when he defines his ministry as “ministering (*hierourgeo*) the gospel of God,” he uses a word occurring only here in the New Testament, which literally means “working in the temple,” in other words, serving as a priest. In fact, one function of a priest is to offer up offerings to the Lord. So Paul speaks here of “the offering up of the Gentiles,” a phrase that is without precise parallel in the New Testament.⁴

Can you imagine a priest trying to minister in the temple without having any offerings to offer up to the Lord? Well the New Testament teaches that every believer is a priest. What are you offering up to God? We do not bring animal sacrifices when we worship, but you should bring a monetary offering on a regular basis. When you sing from your heart during the worship service,

⁴ He was not talking about an offering the Gentiles make, but the offering which the Gentiles are. It has its parallel in Isaiah 66:20; “And they shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations for an offering unto the Lord.”

you are offering up the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). But the best offering you can offer to the Lord is a soul you have won to Christ! Paul won many Gentiles to faith in Christ, and he offered them up as an offering to God.

This insight into ministry certainly adds dignity to our service. What a privilege, and yet what a responsibility, to be the servant & priest of the Triune God, winning the lost to Jesus Christ! We must remember that soul winning is a priestly ministry, a sacred obligation that any believer can and should engage in.

Have you ever made such an offering to the Lord? When you stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, will there be any soul that you can offer up to the Lord that you have won to Christ? Teachers, is there a class member you have won to Christ? Parents, can you say you have led or influenced your children to become Christians? Young people, have you ever led a fellow student to Christ?

Another reason why we should be a witness is this:

B. Lives Are Changed for the Better – I have already talked about this in reference to the Romans who became Christians. But we also see this truth in the last of v.16, where Paul says “that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Here he builds on the idea of engaging in priestly activity by adding that his offering of the Gentiles might be “acceptable” (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5). To be acceptable an offering to God had to conform to conditions of purity. An animal sacrifice in the Old Testament had to be “without blemish.” There was some, no doubt who maintained that Paul’s Gentile converts were “unclean”, because they were not circumcised, & did not keep the Law of Moses. Paul’s reply is that his converts were “clean” because they were sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Peter at the Council of Jerusalem reminds his fellow-Jewish believers how, when the Gentiles heard the gospel, God gave them the Holy Spirit “ever as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

Furthermore, notice the last of v.18. One thing Christ had accomplished through Paul was “to make the Gentiles obedient.” The purpose of preaching the gospel is to win obedience from those who hear it. Many of the converted Gentiles used to be sexually immoral, but now they live in moral purity. They used to lie, but now they are committed to the truth. Many used to steal, but now they work and support their families with an honest living. If we are not also winning souls to obedience to Christ, something is wrong. In fact, if a soul is not won to obedience, that soul has not been won to Christ! Can you say that you are a Christian if you have not been obedient about baptism? Christ commands us through the writer of Hebrews not to forsake the assembling of ourselves as believers (10:25). Yet if someone hardly ever goes to church, is that person a true believer?

But many of you have become obedient to Christ. You can look back on your lives and see the change. You are not all that you should be, but you are a whole lot different from what you used to be. Amen? Christ has changed your life, and it’s because of the power of the Gospel message.

Oh, don’t miss out on the great work of seeing lives changed for the better.

Finally, you should be a witness for Christ for:

C. It Brings Personal Joy and Satisfaction – Paul says in v.17, “Therefore I have reason to glory (*kauchesis*) in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.” God had crowned the Gentile mission with such success that Paul could write to the Romans with confidence. In v.17 he is referring to the act of glorying. The ground is implicit in the “therefore” which points back to verses 15b, 16. Paul is thinking of the gospel triumphs (cf. 2 Cor. 2:14) wrought through his

instrumentality in verse 17, as is demonstrated by v.18. Paul looks back over the work and says, “In Christ Jesus I have reason to boast of my work (in a good sense) for God.”

He is careful to add, however, “in Christ Jesus.” Boasting is excluded except as it is in the Lord. Nothing of egotism is in his glorying; it is glorying in God’s grace. It is not what we do for God that counts, but what we let Him do through us. Christ taught His disciples, “Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Having a meaningful purpose in life brings joy, and energizes our life. If that’s what you want, I challenge you to get involved in the great work of leading others to Jesus.

Now that we have heard the requirements for being a witness, and the reasons for witnessing, now let’s consider together:

III. THE GOALS OF WITNESSING

Setting goals is one effective way for getting things done. So what should be some goals that we should set for ourselves in regard to witnessing?

A. Make Witnessing Your Ambition & Commitment – Paul says in v.20, “And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel....” The word translated by the phrase “preach the gospel” (*euaggelizo*) actually simply means “to share the good news.” This word is not limited to the act of preaching, but to any means of sharing the good news. Not all are called to preach, but all should aim toward the goal (*philotimeomai*) of being a consistent witness (present tense) of the good news of Jesus Christ. We see from Acts 8:1-4 that this was the practice of the early church.

An insurance salesman once told Donald Grey Barnhouse that he had schooled himself to think constantly in terms of selling life insurance. When he met a man for the first time, he was alert for an opportunity to sell insurance. Consequently, he sold a lot of life insurance. Paul had exactly this type of mind, but he was involved in a greater work. While it is important to make provisions for your family in case you die, it is even more important to make provisions for your soul in case you die. And so he was constantly looking for opportunities to share the gospel. That was his aim in life.

Will you join Paul in making this your aim as well? Furthermore, we should make it our goal to:

B. Fulfill This Important Ministry – Too often we fall short in reaching our goals. Some fall short in reaching their educational goals. Perhaps most fall short in reaching their career goals. But Paul did not want to fall short in reaching his goal of being a witness for Christ all over the Roman Empire. Even so, we should make it our goal to complete the task of sharing the gospel with others. Paul felt he had accomplished the first major phase of his goal when he said in the last of v.19, “so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” The phrase “fully preached” (*pleroo*, perfect tense) in v.19 means that he had completed the task of sharing the Gospel in a wide range of the Roman Empire, all the way from the southeastern part of the Empire in Jerusalem up to Illyricum, the northwestern extent of the region. That was NW of Italy, roughly the area of what is now Yugoslavia and Albania.⁵ That covers about 1,400 miles! When you consider the slowness of travel and the dangers involved (2 Cor. 11:26-27), you can appreciate the tremendous achievement of Paul’s missionary ministry. What an example! This does not mean that he had preached the gospel in every locality and to every person

⁵ There is no mention of Illyricum in Acts or in any of the Pauline Epistles up to this time, but he surely preached there at some point. Undoubtedly he went many places that are not detailed for us.

in these territories. As we shall see in just a moment, he considered his task to plant the seeds of the gospel in strategic population centers, from which the gospel could reach every person in each region (cf. 1 Cor. 3:7, 10; Acts 19:10, 20:26-27).

So I challenge you to not only set a general goal of becoming a witness for Christ, but also set some specific goals that you will seek to fulfill. A starting place for many of you would be to set a goal of witnessing to at least one person each week. Or perhaps the goal you will seek to fulfill first will be to witness to everyone a particular social network, such as those at work, or those at school, or everyone on your neighborhood street. You need to go from a general goal to specific to get things done. Then, do not quit until you fulfill your goal.

Finally, I set before you one more goal:

C. Some Need to Witness in a Missionary Setting – Some need to go and share Christ where the gospel has not yet been proclaimed. That's what Paul did. In v.20 we are informed of the policy that guided the apostle in the conduct of his ministry. It was his well-defined and studied procedure not to build upon the foundation laid by another (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10). He does not mean "named" in the loose sense of merely known or reported but in the sense of acknowledged and confessed. Once he had won enough people in a particular city to establish a church, he would move on, leaving them with the task of winning the rest in their city and region to Christ. This does not mean that he would not revisit a church that had been established. What he has in mind in v.20 is that his apostolic activity was directed to the founding of churches and the edifying of churches he had been instrumental in establishing. So it is good for some to have a pioneer ministry and take the Gospel to new territory.

In v.21 he quotes a prophecy from Scripture giving Scriptural authority for this missionary method. There Paul says, "but as it is written: 'To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand.'"⁶

Ed Young, Jr. told of the time he and his wife went to one of those large flea markets. They decided to get lunch from one of the vendors in an outdoor food court. They bought a couple of chicken sandwiches at one of the restaurants and proceeded to one of the tables to eat. After a few minutes, his wife Lisa looked over his shoulder and said, "Honey, check that out." As he turned, he noticed an employee of the restaurant carrying a tray of samples. Normally, a restaurant would hand out samples to potential customers. But this girl was weaving in and out of the picnic tables handing out samples to those who were already stuffing their faces with her restaurant's chicken sandwiches! Lisa said, "Ed, that's hilarious. I mean, all she has to do is walk about fifteen paces, go out to all the hundreds of people who obviously haven't eaten yet and offer the food to them. Yet, she's content to feed the already fed." And that's when it hit him like an all-pro NFL linebacker. He said, "Lisa, that's it! That is the local church in a nutshell." You see, our problem is that we've been so content weaving in and out of the church aisles and handing out samples to the already fed that we have missed the countless opportunities to offer the bread of life to a lost and dying world.⁷

How this verse refutes those who complain against foreign missions on the ground that there is so much work to be done at home! Furthermore, there is something wrong when some 90% of the Bible preachers of the world are concentrated in the United States, where just about everyone at least has the *opportunity* to hear the gospel. We're spending so much time, energy, and money sharing the gospel here in America where Christ has been named over and over and over. We need more who would be willing to go to areas of the world where the true gospel is

⁶ It is a quotation of Isaiah 52:15 from the Septuagint version.

⁷ *Preaching*, May-June '05, pp.9-10.

hardly ever proclaimed. Greg Laughlin, a former member of our church, is doing that in western Asia. Wednesday night we heard an excellent report from Karis Robinett, who went with a mission team to Cambodia. They did medical missions and shared the gospel with hundreds who had never heard before. Many were saved & 2 churches were established.

If you do not go as a missionary, then you should at least give to support those who do go. About 14% of what you give to the general offering goes to mission causes at home and around the world. Last year we gave our \$22,000 to the Lottie Moon International mission offering. Right now we have a goal of collecting over \$7000 for our North American missionaries. Have you given to this offering? If not, why not?

Another application is this: Paul is a great example of an important principle in ministry. We need to stay on task. It was not Paul's calling to preach the gospel in areas where Christ had already been preached. He had a missionary calling, and he stayed focused on fulfilling that calling. Even so you and I need to stay focused on our primary calling in life, as indicated by your spiritual gift, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: This morning I have talked about the good news of Jesus Christ. Have you believed this gospel? Have you repented of your sin, and placed your faith in Jesus Christ? Is your faith real to the point that you are obedient to the Lord? Have you followed Him in baptism and active church membership? If not, we invite you to come forward and make a commitment to the Lord this morning.

My message today is primary to believers. We have not been as obedient as we should be to share the gospel. Let us recommit ourselves to be witnesses for our Lord Jesus. Perhaps someone here today would even commit to answer the call to preach, or the call to become a missionary. May God has His way in our hearts today.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, "God's Glory" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Hobbs read, but no new and useful material found.

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

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