

“Responding to God in Faithful Living”

Studies in Romans (2009-10)

Text – Romans 15:14-22

Message #57 (January 23, 2011)

INSIDE THE HEART OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Introduction

1. We have had the opportunity to listen to Paul's arguments. Now we get to look at Paul's heart. I don't think we can separate doctrine from practice, knowledge from action, information from emotion. At least we should not. In effect we have had almost 15 chapters on doctrine, but now we are given just a little over a chapter to see the heart of the man who wrote this theological treatise. Why did Paul arrange his letter like this?
2. I don't know for sure, but I suspect that it had something to do with both the content of the letter and an understanding of how people receive truth. This has been a very strong letter. If the Romans were anything like we are, they may well have been saying, "I don't know if I like this guy or not? Who is he to challenge us with such a heavy hand?" Such questioning can lead to a dismissal of what has been taught. If I have problems with the messenger I may well miss the message. So I am guessing that Paul wanted them to know who he was and what he was like. He wanted them to know that he was not picking on them. He was writing the letter because God had told him to and had given him the content of the letter. Paul was also looking to forge ahead to Spain and he needed a base of operation to get there. Rome would be a perfect choice if the people were willing to provide and send him. If they could see his heart they might be more willing to help him in the proclamation of the Gospel.
3. Paul's closing message contains both his convictions and his conclusions based on those convictions. That is good for us, because we should be developing the same convictions and drawing the same conclusions.

I. PAUL'S CONVICTIONS (14-16)

- A. About the Roman believers (14) – He was satisfied by what he had heard. He had heard that ...
 1. They were filled with goodness. This is an unusual word referring to moral or ethical goodness. It carries the ideas of kindness, thoughtfulness, and charity. Of course

that is not a natural characteristic to be found in people. Paul affirmed that in chapter 3. But through the Gospel these believers had been transformed. If we were to come up with two or three illustrations of what a true Christian looks like, this surely would be one of them. A true Christian is filled with goodness.

2. They were filled with all knowledge. This is not so much academic, but rather a sound, practical working knowledge of the Christian faith. Pollster George Gallup once described America as "richly religious but ethically impoverished." That would not be so of these Roman believers and ought not to be true of us either! David Wells, the author of the book, **No Place for Truth**, spoke to the issue of our failure to live out what we claim to believe. In an interview with Wells, he was asked what changes he had noticed in seminary students in recent years. He said he noticed four things, 1 – Each entering class was more Biblically illiterate than the last. 2 – Each class was filled with students swamped with personal problems, thinking mostly about themselves rather than their studies or how they might help others. 3 – They had a greater sense of personal rights and entitlements, expecting everything to be done for them. 4 – They were sold out to and mostly uncritical of the surrounding secular culture. That is a sad commentary on the future leaders of the church. Paul indicates that the Roman church was not like that. The Roman believers were filled with practical knowledge.
3. They had the ability to instruct one another – I assume that suggests maturity and a desire to impart truth. I gather that Paul was saying that their lives were built on knowing and doing the truth and advancing the truth. Paul had never been to Rome at the time of writing. He had never seen these people, but their faith was spoken of throughout the Roman world (1:8) and Paul had heard that message. We all have blind spots in our lives and thus have the need for others to point out when we are about to hurt or get hurt. We need others to help us watch and to warn us when we get too close to danger. That is a good thing, especially as it is exercised in a loving body of believers. Every church needs the balance of sound doctrine and faithful ministry to one another. Call it theory and practice or truth and application or knowing and doing – but it must be there in balance or we are not going to fulfill the call of God for our church. We are trying hard to equip you with knowledge, but we may lack in providing examples to follow. By God's grace,

we hope to improve that. So, that was Paul's conviction about the Roman church.

B. About himself and his ministry (15-16)

1. His was a ministry of reminding – I suppose the Romans could have been wondering why Paul was so bold in his letter if he really felt this way about them. He lets them know that this was his job. And that is the job of each of us to remind one another to keep walking in the truth. Notice how Paul practiced that throughout his ministry – 1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 1:6; Titus 3:1. Peter exercised the same admonition – 2 Peter 1:12!
2. His was a ministry of presenting (16) – Paul saw his duty as preaching the Gospel. Those whom God regenerated were presented to God as an offering, set apart for God. It was not Paul offering what he had done or accomplished. It was offering to God what God had done as Paul was faithful to God's calling. The Holy Spirit had already begun a work in them, making them acceptable to God. Paul in turn presents them as an offering to God. (What kind of an offering are we to God? That's a good question to ponder). Paul also gives us his convictions...

C. About his God (15b) "because of the grace given me by God" Paul was making it clear to the Romans that...

1. By God's grace he had been **told to write the letter**. Everything throughout Paul's letters were covered in grace. Here are some examples – Ephesians 2:8 – we are saved by grace. Romans 5:2 – We have gained access by faith into the grace in which we now stand. Romans 5:21 – Grace reigns through righteousness to bring us eternal life. Romans 11:5 – We were chosen by grace. 1 Corinthians 15:10 – It is by grace that we are what we are. Galatians 1:15 – We are called to make known the Gospel by grace. 2 Thessalonians 2:16 – God loved us and gave us everlasting consolation and hope through grace. Titus 3:7 – We were justified by grace. Do you get the point how Paul felt about grace?
2. By God's grace he had been **given this ministry**. Who would have believed this when Paul was on the road to Damascus? Who would have believed this about us? (Once in a while I will run into an old acquaintance from high school days or a neighborhood acquaintance and I discover that they now belong to Christ. In many of those cases, I never would have guessed it – it is by grace! There are some who can't believe that I am in ministry! Believe me, it is by grace)! Earlier in life Paul

was ready to literally sacrifice believers, but now he is presenting them as a sacrifice or offering to God. In the first, what he was doing was toward destruction. Now his attention was for God's glory. Those are Paul's convictions. He now is ready to share his conclusions based on those convictions.

II. PAUL'S CONCLUSIONS (17-22)

A. The motivation of ministry – to glory in Christ (17)

1. Paul is **not bragging** about his ministry. He is boasting about God's workings in the lives of people. We celebrate what God graciously is willing to do through us! God does the work. We are just the vessel through whom He accomplishes His work!
2. Paul was **not trying to make a name for himself**. He was only interested in bringing glory to God. This whole passage is built on the truth that God graciously works through people, so that when ministry prospers, it is God who has done it through the Spirit of Christ. Paul understood that and wanted others to understand it also.
3. To say it another way, Paul boasts in Christ because of what Christ has done through Paul's ministry. And what has the Lord done? He has brought into existence a saved and sanctified and obedient people that Paul now brings to God as an offering of worship. That is how Paul can see his ministry as glorying in Christ.
4. In the words of John Piper (2006 sermon on this text), ***To watch a people grow in radical obedience to Jesus, and to watch them fall out of love with the world and into love with Christ, and to see them seek the kingdom first and let material things go, to see them become bold in their witness, and compassionate toward the poor, and respectful toward ethnic diversity, and devoted to sexual purity, and committed to world missions, and a wartime lifestyle that maximizes resources for the global cause of magnifying Christ—to see this happen in our ministry through Jesus Christ is the greatest thing that can happen to a pastor.*** (And I would expand that to anyone who belongs to Christ. That's what motivated Paul. That should also motivate us).
5. James Boice writes, ***“Paul gloried in what Christ had done through him. The most glorious thing of all is that Jesus was able to accomplish these things through such a person as Paul. The wonder is that He could take this proud, stubborn, self-righteous murderer of God's people and turn him into the greatest pioneer missionary the world has ever seen. Paul could never take that glory to himself. Yet the more he***

was able to accomplish, the greater was the glory that went to Christ.” That should be true of us as well! Why do you think God chose the weak of the world? Why do you think He chose you? He did so to make known His wonderful grace for His glory alone!

B. The marks of ministry (18 -19)

1. The mark of **honesty** (18a) – Paul said, and his ministry affirmed, that he would speak of nothing except what Christ had accomplished through him. He did this because he understood that whatever we might accomplish of value must be of God. People in ministry are not always honest in accessing their ministries. We are tempted to exaggerate our effectiveness and underestimate the impact of the work of others. Frankly, ministry should be a “spin free” zone.
2. The mark of **consistency** (18b) – Paul’s ministry was by word **and deed**. In other words, he practiced what he preached. His assignment was to bring the Gentiles to obedience – that is to obedience to the Gospel, to salvation. Obviously that was not possible for Paul to accomplish on his own because only God can regenerate. But God’s means to regeneration is the proclamation of the Gospel through us. Paul did that consistently. And he never forgot the reason God had saved him and he was careful not to allow anything to distract him from that assignment. He could have had a wonderful, lifelong ministry in Ephesus or Corinth but that was not his assignment. He could have attached himself to the ministry of others, but that is not what God had called him to. What has God directed you to do? Are you doing it? Are you doing it for His glory alone.
3. The mark of **authenticity** (19a) – Paul’s ministry was marked by the supernatural. He uses three different words for miraculous activity – signs, wonders and power. He used the same words in 2 Corinthians 12:11-12 to remind the Corinthians that he had performed the same signs as the other apostles, authenticating him also as an apostle. (He told them that because many had not accepted his apostleship. I am not saying that miracles must accompany the Gospel in order for it to be affectively received. Sometimes miracles were even a distraction. When Paul and Silas healed someone in Lystra, the people first tried to worship them and later tried to kill them! They were not thrilled about either response! I do not believe that the presentation of the Gospel that is not accompanied by miracles is somehow

anemic. The Gospel message itself is the power of God unto salvation. But I do think that our ministry must be in some way marked by the power of God. By that I mean that it should be evident that what we are doing is far greater than anything we could do on our own! God is at work! If what we are doing we can do it without God, we are not doing what we need to be doing!

4. The mark of **tenacity** (19b) – Paul mentions his journeys from Jerusalem to Illyricum, which I think was more than 1400 miles – and he was still going! When we consider the challenges in travel and the dangers along the way, we can appreciate this tremendous achievement. But Paul speaks of this as merely fulfilling the ministry of the Gospel, and he did not believe that he was yet finished. There is something to be said about perseverance, tenaciously doing the work until it is done. And in relation to the Gospel it is only done for us when He calls us home. Do we understand that we are always to be on mission as representatives of the Lord Jesus? There are no days off, no vacations and no retirement!

C. The manner of ministry – God has given to each of us an assignment. Ultimately it is to glorify Him by doing what He commanded, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who supplies both the energy (power) and the resources (gifts) to get the job done. Those jobs may differ but they are all important. Paul identifies his particular ministry in the following ways:

1. Paul's pioneer ministry – His calling and desire was to preach where the Gospel was not known. This reminds me of the mission of such ministries as New Tribes Mission and Un-evangelized Fields Mission. Some have NEVER heard the Gospel. That is where these groups were committed to go. That was Paul's heart. I don't think God wired me that way. I think I work best building on the foundation someone else has laid. I am not a trailblazer. I am a plodder. God can use both and a whole lot of people in between. What is your ministry? Are you actively involved in that ministry?
2. Paul's life verse – Isaiah 52:15 – **“Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”** Paul took that and accepted it as his mandate for ministry and he never strayed from it. Remember what he said in Corinth. “I planted. Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” We need some planters and we need some waterers. God will take care of bringing them to life!

3. Paul's priority (v. 22) – Paul states it again. It was that work, that pioneer ministry, that hindered him from coming to Rome. He wanted to come to Rome for various reasons – to preach the Gospel, to impart certain spiritual gifts, to provide a launching point to go on to Spain, and perhaps many other reasons, but he was **hindered** by the work that he was doing. Paul told the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:16) that he had been hindered by the enemies of the Gospel, and (1 Thessalonians 2:18) by Satan himself. But here the hindrance is not an enemy but rather the sheer volume of work to be done. Paul is saying, I'll get there as soon as God releases me from this assignment in this location. In the mean time, stay faithful and obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

1. Paul was not just describing for us something that has no relevance to other Christians but himself. He was not just telling us how he went about his business because he wanted to talk about himself. Paul shared his life with us, his designs and desires and goals and priorities in ministry because he wanted these things to capture our hearts too. He wanted us to think on these things as we relate to one another. He wanted us to think in these terms as we live our lives as active disciples of and witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. That is a look at Paul's heart! What about our hearts? Does any of this resonate with us? Will any of this have an impact on how we live the Gospel for the glory of Christ? That is where we need to do some business with the Lord. Maybe there are some things we need to confess, change, rearrange, stop, start, improve, learn, practice, or set aside for the glory of Christ and the advancement of the Gospel. What do you think?
3. I am not big on Bible paraphrases, but when I find good ones that can be used properly to give us some light they can be a help to us. Consider this translation of Colossians 3:12-17 from J. B. Phillips, as we close the service today. ***As, therefore, God's picked representatives of the new humanity, purified and beloved of God himself, be merciful in action, kindly in heart, humble in mind. Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another, always ready to forgive if you have a difference with anyone. Forgive as freely as the Lord has forgiven you. And, above everything else, be truly loving, for love is the golden chain of all the virtues. Let the peace of Christ rule in***

your hearts, remembering that as members of the same body you are called to live in harmony, and never forget to be thankful for what God has done for you. Let Christ's teaching live in your hearts, making you rich in the true wisdom. Teach and help one another along the right road with your psalms and hymns and Christian songs, singing God's praises with joyful hearts. And whatever you may have to do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, thanking God the Father through him.