

Romans 15 v 14-33

Introduction

The Epistle is hastening to its close. Paul has set out the way of Salvation and way of Christian living. Now the missionary's last words are about his plans for future. In doing so, he reveals the kind of man and missionary he was.

Longing to meet the Christians in Rome. Then to go on to Spain – the western limit of the known world. Not know if he would ever get there. Perhaps, if he was released from prison in Rome, he could travel East (to accommodate Pastoral Epistles) and West. But before then, to go to Jerusalem to take some money to poor Christians there. Intense longing to get to Rome, because heart and centre of Empire. Little did he realize that he would get what he longed for, but in an unexpected way, as a prisoner appealing to Roman Emperor.

Aim as a Missionary

Paul states his aim **That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost** (Romans 15:16). As a priest consecrated himself to God, Paul consecrated himself to preaching the Gospel, that Gentiles might be an offering well pleasing to God, and that Gentiles lives might be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Note aim of his preaching – not just that people should make a profession, but that lives should be completely changed, and that by the working of the Holy Spirit they might be consecrated to the Lord. He also aimed **to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed** (Romans 15:18). Aim of Christian work - repentance and believing, bringing men into subjection to God, His Law and His Word.

All our knowledge, all our blessings and all our experiences are to make us obedient to God and to enjoy power of indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It would simplify our work for God, if we ever kept this aim in view. Seems very humdrum, but this is purpose of everything. Our preaching, worship, doctrines, all God's gifts – are to make us obedient. How far is God's purpose being achieved in us?

And in this task Paul sees himself as God's instrument and nothing more. Paul does not speak of what he has done, but saw himself as merely an instrument, or a tool in God's hand. Never "what I did" but what Christ used him to do. The picture is of God as the real worker and the Christian as the tool. It is not us who are the workers with God just as helper. God is the agent and we are the instruments. To be as ready for Master's use as pen in hands of writer or chisel in hand of workman. Revolutionary effect on people's attitude to Christian work.

Recently read testimony of a man who had been a minister of an Essex church for five years. For the first three years, he was constantly concerned about what he must be doing, felt that at all times he must be "at it", must be doing God's work. Then got a

jolt at a “quiet day”. After that he saw his work in quite a different light. He saw it was not *his* church, but God’s church. He saw that God was working there, and that he was no longer spiritual director, but spiritual detector. When he went visiting, it was not to see what he could do for God, but to see what God was doing and find whose hearts He was touching. When he preached at the church he wondered who God was speaking to that day. “It is God’s work. He transforms people quietly and steadily. It is not dependent on the preacher. The power is God’s, the life is His alone to give”, he concluded.

Strategy as a Missionary

Paul had been a missionary for 20 years. Measure of pleasure at what Christ had accomplished through him. From Jerusalem – throughout Turkey and Greece, Cyprus and to Albania (which is Illyricum, not mentioned in Acts). He was able to say **I have fully preached** (Romans 15:19) – a thorough worker. In main cities along principal roads there now was a chain of Christian churches.

Now his strategy was to preach Gospel **not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation** (Romans 15:20). Desire to carry good news to men who had never heard it. He desired to go to Spain, though he was uncertain if he would get there. (He eventually got there in the 16th Century – in his Gospel – until its growth was arrested by Spanish Inquisition) C.f. Livingstone volunteering to be missionary with L.M.S. Asked where he would like to go, answered “Anywhere, so long as it is forward”. When he arrived in Africa he was haunted by smoke of 1000 villages which he saw in the distance.

So often this worldwide vision is lost on Christians today. How much overlapping and fishing in the same pool. Have known of a student who was unwilling to preach in certain parts of Ulster because he felt they were “preached out”, while so many other parts of Ireland were untouched by the Gospel. 10% of world’s population is English speaking, yet 90% of world’s Christians are among that 10% (Also 94% of the Christian preachers and 96% of income are among that 10%). In other words, 90% of the world is non-English speaking and has 10% of the world’s Christians, 6% of the world’s preachers, and 4% of the income.

Practical Approaches as a Missionary

Before going to Rome, Paul had to go to Jerusalem. The Gentiles had made a collection for the poor of Jerusalem. The Gentiles owed them this material support because they had heard the Gospel from them. The Jerusalem Church was very poor. Much employment was connected with the Temple, therefore probably Christians lost their jobs when they were converted. No unemployment benefit. There was no better way of expressing unity of the church than this show of practical support. Thus Paul taught new converts they were not isolated units but members of a worldwide church. No better way of putting Christianity into practical action. Easy enough to talk about generosity, here was the chance to turn words into deeds.

Paul and Barnabas had taken similar gift to Jerusalem Church from Syrian Antioch 11 years earlier during time of famine (Acts 11:30; 12:25). Jerusalem church wanted them to remember poor (Galatians 2:10). Early church was very practical. In Acts

2:45 we read **they sold their possessions and parted them to all men as every man had need.**

Dependence as a Missionary

Paul was undoubtedly superior to his readers in terms of knowledge and experience, yet so tactful and gracious. **Ye are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another** (Romans 15:14). Then he urges them **Strive together with me in your prayers to God for me** (Romans 15:30), for he is dependent on the prayers of the Roman church. Aware of dangers in Judea because of unbelieving Jews. Also wants them to pray that he will come to Rome with joy and have helpful fellowship.

Therefore he opens his heart and reveals his misgivings. No false pride kept Paul from revealing his anxieties to the Romans. Strong men are not afraid to let themselves go before weaker Christians, and glad of their support. Paul needs sympathy and help and prayers of others. Craves to be prayed for. Always praying himself, and asking others to do the same for him.

Good to know we are wrapped in the warmth of the prayers of those who love us. However far away they may be, whatever their situation, we can always pray. When we can do nothing else, we can always do the greatest thing – pray.

Conclusion

The aim – obedience. We are instruments. Get Gospel to un-reached countries. Be practical. Be open with others. Ask for prayers. Be prayerful for others. Paul's doxology **Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen** (Romans 15:33)