

## THE PRIESTLY DUTY OF PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

Romans 15:14-33

Key Verse: 15:16

*"... to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."*

In the first part of Romans 15, Paul encouraged us to build up each other so that we may glorify God with one mind and one voice. In today's passage, Paul begins his long epilogue to this letter by recounting his ministry to the Gentiles. He also shares his future mission plans, asking the Christians in Rome to pray for him. St. Paul was one of the most influential figures in the Christian history. More than anything, he was a missionary. Mission was in his DNA. May God help us to learn from Paul's mission life as we meditate on this passage!

### I. PRIESTLY DUTY, BY GOD'S GRACE (14-22)

Look at verses 14-15. *I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me.* Paul was about to talk about the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God. At this point, some believers in Rome might be thinking, "Well, this part of the letter does not apply to me. I am not a priest." Some of you also might say the same thing. So Paul first reminds us that all believers, not just pastors and missionaries, are called to the ministry of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is true. Jesus saved us from our sin and death, not to live a selfish life, but to be his faithful witnesses (Ac 1:8). There was a young man who was tormented by many demons. He cried out night and day among the tombs. Jesus had mercy on him and healed him. He was so thankful that he wanted to travel with Jesus. But Jesus did not let him. Instead he told him, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went home and began to tell how much Jesus had done for him (Mk 5:19-20). He became a minister for the people in his hometown. There was a man named Simon Peter who lived an ordinary life as a fisherman, chasing fish every night. Jesus called him to be his disciple, saying, "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mk 1:17). Jesus trained him for more than three years to be a spiritual leader. But Peter was full of his own ideas. So after his resurrection, Jesus came to him and said three times, "Simon, Do you truly love me? Take care of my sheep" (Jn 21:15-17). The Risen Christ also said to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). We cannot miss the calling of Jesus to mission if we are willing to listen to him.

Likewise, Paul was convinced that the believers in Rome were full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another (14). They were good in God's eyes because they obeyed the word of God. They were filled with knowledge, meaning they were equipped with the word of God through their sincere Bible studies. They were competent Bible teachers. They were ready to instruct one another. Actually, Paul wasn't saying this to make them feel good. He knew that some of them were indeed spiritually mature. The church in Rome consisted of immigrants from various parts of the Empire. Paul personally knew many of them. For example, Priscilla and Aquila were his coworkers (16:3). Together they pioneered the churches in Corinth and Ephesus. Andronicus and Junia had been in Christ before Paul was, and Paul recognized them as outstanding apostles (16:7). Knowing them, he did not try to write something new to them. He wanted to share spiritual gifts to make them strong so that he and they might be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (Ro 1:11-12). So he wrote about the essence of the gospel with great boldness. It was to remind them of it again. The gospel of Jesus is very simple. Yet it is deeper than the ocean. By the grace of God, Paul wrote this letter with a deep caring heart for the believers in Rome. He probably did not realize that how many people throughout history would be blessed by his writing. That includes all of us!

Let us read verses 15b-16. ... *because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.* Paul says that he became a minister of Christ by the grace of God. In other words, he was thankful to God. Wait a minute! Ever since he was converted to the Christian faith, Paul's life was in constant danger. Many people tried to kill him simply because he was preaching the gospel of Jesus. Yet he says that it was by God's grace he became a minister of Christ. He was deeply thankful to God for calling him to be a minister of Christ.

How about you? Do you personally consider God's calling to campus mission as the grace of God upon your life? We are all grateful to God for saving us from our sin and death through the blood of Jesus. But do we also acknowledge, as Paul did, that by the grace of God we have been called to mission? Paul was an unlikely candidate to become a missionary, because he was an enemy of Christians in Jerusalem. He actively persecuted the young church there. But God saved him and called him to be a minister of Christ (Ac 9:15). It was only by the grace of God. And he never forgot this grace. He said, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1Co 15:10). I am also grateful to God whenever I think about his amazing grace upon my life. He saved me from all my sins and gave me a glorious hope in heaven. Not only that, he called me to campus mission that gives me a true meaning in life. I was also an unlikely candidate to become a missionary, because I was a proud sinner. In fact, I consider it a miracle that God called me to be a minister of Christ!

How did Paul describe his ministry? He says that God gave him the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God. What does this mean? A priest is a mediator between God and people. He brings people to God by praying for them. He brings God to people by studying God's word with them and teaching them the ways of God. Paul says that proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles is a priestly duty. To proclaim the gospel of God is

more than just delivering information. It is to take care of people with the word of truth. In today's terms, to be a ministry of Christ Jesus with the priestly duty means that we become shepherds for people, to help them to come to God and grow spiritually through the word of God, to pray for them in times of good and bad, and to help them to follow God's ways by setting good examples for them.

Paul says that God gave him *the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit*. What does it mean that the Gentiles become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit? In the Old Testament, priests had many duties. One of them was to offer animal sacrifices on the altar. God accepted these sacrifices and forgave the sins of the Israelites. But these animal sacrifices were temporary. They pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ died once and for all as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is our Great High Priest. And as disciples of Jesus, we are called to be small priests who can bring an acceptable offering to God. Only this time, it is not an animal sacrifice God wants us to bring to him. Through his preaching, Paul raised up disciples of Jesus who became a living sacrifice before God (Ro 12:1). Likewise, God wants us to raise up faithful and sacrificial disciples of Jesus through our prayers and Bible studies. St. Peter also says in 1 Peter 2:4-5: "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Paul's goal in carrying out his priestly duty was not just helping the Gentiles to receive the salvation grace. Mass evangelism was not his goal. Rather, it was to help each person to become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In other words, his goal was to raise up disciples of Jesus who obey the word of God wholeheartedly with the help of the Holy Spirit. He says in verse 17. *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God*. Paul considered it his honor to serve the Lord as a minister. God allowed him to taste his glory by blessing his ministry with signs and wonders. He says in verses 18-19. *I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ*.

Paul says something quite impressive here. He said that he had fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum (today's Bosnia). Indeed, Paul had a great pioneering spirit. He had an ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known (20-21). His mission strategy was to reach out to people who had not heard the gospel rather than building on someone else's foundation. He had no intention of building a megachurch by poaching believers from other churches. With this pioneering spirit, Paul walked thousands of miles on rugged terrains to carry the gospel of Jesus. Through his three missionary journeys he pioneered four churches in Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe), three churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea), and a church in Achaia (Corinth), and laid the

groundwork for a tremendous ministry in Asia Minor through the city of Ephesus. But he was not done yet. At the time he wrote this letter, his plan was to go to Spain, which was considered to be the end of the earth. He wanted to drop by Rome on the way and share his world mission vision with the Roman Christians. The second half of today's passage is about his mission plans.

## II. PAUL'S WORLD MISSION VISION (23-33)

Paul had devoted his life to evangelizing the vast areas between Jerusalem and Illyricum. Now he felt that there was no more place for him to work in those regions (23), because he raised up disciples of Jesus who could carry on the work continually. Now he was ready to visit Rome. He had been longing for many years to visit the city. Look at verse 24. *I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.* Why was Paul so eager to visit Rome? Many people also want to visit Rome today. It is one of the most popular tourist destinations. There are so many interesting places to see in the city, including the Coliseum, the Roman Forum, the Pantheon, St. Peter's Basilica, and the Trevi Fountain, and so on. But Paul was not a tourist. He wanted to encourage the Christians in Rome (Ro 1:11-12). He also had a plan to practically act out his world mission vision by visiting Rome, the center of the civilization at that time, and move on to Spain--to the ends of the earth. Paul must have accepted Jesus' command in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Paul's world mission vision is an inspiration for us today. Paul had worked hard all his life to serve the Lord. Humanly speaking, he deserved a vacation, more than anyone. But that's not what he was thinking. He was still focused on proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth.

But he had an important task to take care of before his planned visit to Rome. Look at verses 25-29. *Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.*

The reason Paul was compelled to visit Jerusalem was that he wanted to deliver a special offering collected by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the believers in Jerusalem who were suffering from a famine. Paul was aware that it would be dangerous for him to go there. He was well-known in the city as a Pharisee who had become a follower of Jesus. The Jews hated him as a traitor. Many were intent on killing him given an opportunity. But Paul thought that it was worth risking his life to take an offering from the Gentile churches to the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul knew that there was a serious cultural barrier between Jewish believers and the Gentile Christians. The Jewish believers with their strong Judaist background were reluctant to accept the

Gentile believers with their strong pagan background. The Gentile Christians probably felt that they were treated as a second class Christians and resented it. Paul saw the famine in Jerusalem as an opportunity to bridge the gap. With his encouragement, the believers in Macedonia and Achaia gave sacrificially for the relief work. They did so with the love of Christ. Paul hoped that the Christians in Jerusalem would accept their love and their new identity as Christians. To Paul, the offering was more than money. It would be the Gentile Christians' acknowledgment of their spiritual debt to Israel. It would also be the Jewish Christians' acceptance of the Gentile Christians as their own brothers and sisters in Christ. This was an important part of his world mission vision.

As important as the trip was, Paul knew it would be very dangerous for him. So he asked for a prayer support. *I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me (30).* Paul asked the Romans to pray for two prayer topics. First, for his safety and for his visit to Rome. Second, that the Jewish believers would accept the offering from the Gentiles, and that they would accept God's purpose for them. Look at verses 31-32. *Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed.* It turned out that Paul was right. He was arrested in Jerusalem on false charges, and kept in prison for 2 years. Then he was sent to Rome as a prisoner in chains. God fulfilled Paul's world mission vision, as he continued his priestly duty by preaching the gospel in prison and also in his rented house in Rome (Ac 28:30). Paul was a faithful missionary to the end. May the Lord help us to be faithful servants to the end of our lives!

Finally, Paul finished his prayer requests with benediction. He said, *"The God of peace be with you all. Amen"* (33).

In today's passage, we learned St. Paul's sense of mission as a minister of Christ Jesus. He took the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel seriously because it was given to him by the grace of God. He would not stop preaching the gospel until everyone in the world has heard it. May God help us also to take the priestly duty seriously! May God help us to faithfully share the gospel with our students until they become an acceptable offering to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit!