

"The Divine Human Partnership of Ministry"

Romans 15:14-33

As we come to Romans 15:14 Paul is beginning to wind down his letter to the Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus who live in the world's largest city of the day, Rome. If we lived in that time we understood from Roman culture that everything was about status and power. If you wanted to be a successful Roman you had to wield your influence in order to gain power and that meant people were only necessary if they helped you up the ladder.

But a follower of Jesus lives counter-culturally. As we've seen throughout the letter Paul's example and exhortation for Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus (who both come from diverse backgrounds) to resist the cultural influence of the day and serve one another. That will build Jesus' church and present it in a more influential way so that people could see there's a different way to live that gives you meaning and purpose in Jesus through serving; putting others ahead of oneself.

Even though Paul is now moving away from his teaching on giving up your rights and freedoms even as a Christian so that we don't offend other believers who are still growing in their understanding of how to live out their faith, he hasn't stopped building them up as a unified people who need to look beyond their personal preferences and keep the big picture in mind. And that is getting the message of Jesus out to their friends, neighbours and where it hasn't gone to yet.

So, Paul begins to share his plan to see them and to encourage the believers in Jerusalem and what he plans for the future. But these are not just his plans, he sees God's hand in it all. And that's sometimes the tricky part for us to grasp as believers. What is our role and what is God's role? What do we plan and what do we leave it with God? Paul gives us a healthy framework to build on when we're seeking God's will or trying to discern what our role is. The amazing thing about all of this is that God wants to partner with imperfect sinners in order to pass on the eternal life-giving message of salvation in Jesus. What then can we learn here about our role and God's role in helping the church grow spiritually and numerically?

Paul transitions from the 'how do we get along when we disagree section' by saying in 15:14,

¹⁴ I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵ Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of pro-claiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸ 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— ¹⁹ by the power of signs and miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells the Romans they are mature enough to sort out these tricky issues believing that he has equipped them by teaching God's Word how to grow together. This is why God called him but he is very careful to state that it was God working through him. And not just God, he shows us . . .

[The Role of the Trinity in the Work of the Gospel](#)
15:14-19a

Paul gives us a glimpse of how God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit work in helping us do the work of spreading the gospel and see the gospel growing us into mature followers of Jesus. Paul clearly says it was by God's grace that God called him to get the Word to the Gentiles. He is very careful not to boast of himself and his teaching but instead points to the grace of God. This is a reminder to us to

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Be humbled that God calls us to proclaim His Word (vv.14-16a)

Even though he states he has written them quite boldly on some points he clearly points to God who has graciously turned Paul's life around to be able to do what he has done. Paul knows apart from the grace of God he would not be where he was. In 1 Timothy 1:12 Paul said of himself,

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

God took a religious persecutor, bent and bound to destroy the work of God and made him the most visible voice of the gospel in his day and most prolific writer of biblical teaching. The apostle Paul was humbled by God's grace in saving him and choosing him to serve him and so should we be careful not to make any ministry about us but always to point people to the grace of God for the results He causes to happen, specifically by the Holy Spirit. Paul knew that, yes, God had gifted him and called him to serve Him, he was also very aware to ...

Trust the Holy Spirit to transform lives (v.16b, 19a)

Twice Paul gives credit to the power of the Holy Spirit who takes the Word of God spoken by Paul to make changes in people's hearts. Paul uses 'priestly' language to describe what he did (speak truth to people) as an offering acceptable to God that the Holy Spirit sets apart (meaning of sanctify) now for God's purposes.

Paul knew he wasn't the one who changed peoples lives; it was the Holy Spirit taking God's Words as Paul explained them and spoke to people's hearts changing their minds about Jesus because they understood what He did for them on the cross. And it's no different for us. We were saved by God's grace as we heard the Word of truth spoken by someone who was obedient to God. God's Spirit took the Word and changed our hearts. And now every time we obediently speak and do things for God the Spirit uses what we do to change people's hearts; whether helping fellow believers grow in Christ or the unsaved hear and see the gospel.

This is extremely comforting knowing the results of what we do are not dependent on how effective we are but how obedient we are and powerful the Spirit is. That also changes our perspective on how we measure the effectiveness of ministry. Are numbers important? To some degree in the sense that if we are obedient to God we should see more people come to know Christ. But, it is not the true standard by which we measure the effectiveness of our ministry. Jesus said teaching the Word is like planting seeds. It takes time for the seed to grow. It needs the

right atmosphere and mixture of ingredients, but once we put the seed in the ground there's not much power in us to make anything grow. We have to trust the Creator of the soil who alone knows how it actually works, to do the work. Same with ministry. You can teach a bible study or class for years or share the gospel over and over or treat unkind people with kindness and not see any results for the longest time. Then one day you hear or find out that people were listening that some did respond by how we treated them, and they changed. You see, if we only measure by numbers or instant results, we'll could take credit for what we do. Instead Paul says . . .

Give glory to Jesus who makes all this possible (vv.17-18)

17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 18 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—

The focus of the gospel is Jesus Christ. It is only through faith in His death, burial and resurrection that can save us – not by works lest we boast. But we also thank Jesus and magnify Him for all that we are able to do in His Name, because at the Name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. Jesus is the One who reveals the Father to us and His plan to save us. Jesus is the One who sent the Holy Spirit to us after He ascended into heaven. Jesus is the One who modelled for us that we don't glorify ourselves because Jesus always sought to bring His Father the glory. And since they are the same yet distinct to glorify One is to glorify the other. There is no contradiction.

Our ministry is not about us. It's about the grace given to us by God, who through the power of the Holy Spirit because of Jesus Christ, saved us and gifts us for ministry so we can help Jew and Gentile come to grow in Christ together. Of which, Paul now returns in his focus. This bold teaching that reminded them of God's grace was to help these two diverse people groups serve together for the work of the gospel. And as Paul shows us . . .

The Place of Planning in the Work of the Gospel (15:19b-29)

. . . he also shows how God used his plans to strengthen Jewish and Gentile disciples.

How do we know if our plans are of God? Or should we just sit back and 'Wait on the Lord'? The phrase wait on the Lord is found in the Old Testament only a few times and does not mean sit back and do nothing while God does everything. It means to serve God with eager expectation knowing He's going to fulfil His Word. It never means do nothing. Even praying for God to show us is still serving Him with the expectation that He will show us when we're unsure or stuck.

Paul made plans based on the Word of God. God promised in Acts 1:8 to empower the disciples to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Paul took that seriously. He went on 3 separate journeys to plant churches making his way towards the ends of the earth as he knew it.

But what about our own plans locally to serve God and help His church to grow or spread the gospel? Paul shows us to

Make sure our ambition is a holy one (vv.19b-24)

As he outlined his future plans to preach the gospel where Christ was not known and why he

hadn't been to Rome yet, he stated it had always been his ambition to preach the gospel to new areas. The word 'ambition' means to love to honour'. Paul loved to honour Christ where Christ had not yet been made known. That's what a holy ambition is" to set apart what we want to do so Jesus and God get the honour. Ultimately God had placed this desire in Paul's heart to honour Him where He hadn't been honoured yet.

This is a good measuring tool for us when we have a ministry idea. Is it a holy ambition? Is our aim to love to honour Jesus through it? Or is the aim of what we do – "for Jesus" – more about us getting the honour? That's also a good reminder that we aim to honour Jesus when we see ministry done well. God thoroughly enjoys using us as His servants but the aim of all our ministries is to honour the Lord in them.

Col. 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Whatever we do, is fairly broad and diverse. When we have an idea about ministry lets first ask 'is my ambition to honour God through this' and if it is, take the necessary steps to make it happen, which will include bringing people alongside as we'll see in just a minute.

But Paul's aim here, to get the gospel out where people haven't heard about Jesus, also had another goal to it. In sending out the gospel to new areas Paul did it . . .

While strengthening the people close to him (vv.25-29)

How so? Paul states that he was delayed from getting to Rome and now he was going to Jerusalem [!] to personally bring the collection he had been gathering for the poor believers back in Jerusalem. And when he has completed his task he will head for Spain, stopping in Rome probably to establish as a base. So why couldn't someone else take the offering to Jerusalem? Paul probably wanted to personally make sure it got there but mostly to testify to these Jewish believers that Gentile believers from Macedonia and Achaia and other places had given sacrificially because they realized as Paul explained in Ch. 11 that were it not for God's plan starting with the Jews, that these Gentiles who were now grafted into the tree of Abraham by faith, wanted to show their unity by this gift. Paul was linking the two groups together by a mutual need, strengthening these two culturally diverse people groups who were struggling to find unity.

This of course lends itself well to Paul's last 4 verses which remind us that for the Divine-Human partnership of ministry to work, we obviously . . .

Need Human Partners in the Work of the Gospel **(15:30-33)**

We need each other to help do ministry for two basic reasons:

For the progress of the gospel (vv.20-31)

³⁰ 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.³¹ 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

Even though Paul's planning was a holy ambition and was all about strengthening the church, he knew he needed divine help. So, he asked these believers – most of whom who didn't know him – to pray that he would be physically protected from the Jewish unbelievers and that the Jewish believers would accept Paul. But if you're doing God's will doesn't that mean God will always keep you safe? Paul wouldn't have agreed. Read about Paul's sufferings in 2 Cor. 7 and 11. Many people don't want God's plans to succeed so Paul says strive with me in prayer. The word for 'strive' is the word we get for agonize. Agonize with me in the work of prayer. All ministries need prayer because we want it to be God's work not our own. Our efforts can fail but only God's will succeed. Our efforts can result in our praise and not God's.

If Paul needed prayer for the work of the gospel and for himself how silly are we not to ask for prayer. To pray for everything that takes place here and through our missionaries. Prayer is spiritual labour asking God to do the work through His Spirit to produce fruit.

The other basic reason we partner with each other with God is . . .

For our mutual joy (vv.32-33)

³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. ³³ The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

This is what Paul prayed for when he began this letter in

^{1:11} I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

One of the neat blessings we get from serving God we each get God's joy when we obey Him together. This combination of our spiritual progress and joy is a natural by-product of growing in Christ. In Phil 1:25 when Paul was imprisoned he was quite expectant that he would be released from jail so that he would continue with them *"for your progress and joy in the faith."*

God intends for us to grow together and experience His joy together. But if we're not partnering with others in ministry we won't grow as God desires and we miss out on His joy. His joy is eternal joy that we can get a taste of now and will have for all eternity.

God wants to work with us to advance the truth of His Word to help us grow into Christlikeness as we reach new people with the gospel. The question we need to answer from the passage this morning is: are we spectators of this ministry or are we partners in this ministry? Spectators hear about what God is doing and can even praise God for what He's doing but they miss out on the joy of being involved. A spectator mentality can develop 'an armchair' mentality; offering opinions and even criticisms of what's going on in ministry but not being willing to be involved – and you lose out on progressing in spiritual maturity and receiving joy in the faith. Because God grows us in community. We form the body of Christ and all parts are necessary for the work of the gospel.

When we read the epistles of Paul we see he had to spend a lot of time and energy trying to get God's people to partner with God's people for the gospel of Jesus Christ so the Spirit can work and God be glorified. And not much has changed since then. God has saved us and called us all by grace to glorify Him by serving together. All of us can say as Paul did:

¹² **I** thank Christ Jesus **my** Lord, who has given **me** strength, that he considered **me** trustworthy, appointing **me** to his service. ¹³ Even though **I** was once a _____ **I** was shown mercy because **I** acted in ignorance and unbelief. . . . so that in **me**, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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