

THE MESSENGER OR MINISTER OF GOD

ROMANS 15: 14–21

Introduction

This is one of the most descriptive passages dealing with the minister of God. It forcefully reveals what it was that made Paul such a great minister of God.

- I. He was gracious in dealing with people (v. 14).
- II. He was bold in reminding people of the gospel (v. 15).
- III. He was called to minister the gospel of God (v. 16).
- IV. He gloried only in Christ and things that pertain to God (vv. 17-19).
- V. He sought to preach the gospel in pioneer areas (vv. 20-21).

I. Romans 15:14 Minister's Respect for People

The minister of God is gracious in dealing with people. Note two significant points.

1. Paul called the members of the Roman congregation brothers (vv. 15, 16). Paul did not look upon himself as being superior to the Roman congregation. He did not see himself...
 - as being better
 - as being more spiritual
 - as being more intellectual
 - as being more educated

Paul never looked upon himself as being superior to other believers in any sense of the word. Note also: Paul was not nagging, harping or badgering the Roman congregation. On the contrary, he was addressing the congregation in the most gracious of spirits, treating them as his equal before God. Paul called the members *brothers*, not *sons* and *daughters*.

2. Paul acknowledged the commendable qualities of the Roman congregation. He mentioned three qualities or traits in particular.
 - a. The believers were “full of goodness” (mestoi agathosunes): full of kindness and helpfulness, of virtue and excellence, of peace and conciliation, of inner depth and richness.

Eph 3:19 *And to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Psa 33:5 *The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfading love.*

Psa 34:8 *Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*

Isa 63:7 *I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us — yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.*

- b. The believers were filled “complete in knowledge” (pasēs gnōseōs): spiritual insight and perception; knowledge of Christ, God and the Holy Spirit, and of the spiritual need of man and his world; spiritual truth

John 7:16-17 *Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”*

John 8:31-32 *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

John 17:3 *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

Phil 3:10 *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*

Col 1:10 *And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.*

2 Pet 1:5 *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;*

2 Pet 2:2-3 *Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these [false] teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*

- c. The believers were able “able to instruct” (nouthetein) one another: to put in mind, to implant the truth into the mind, to guide and correct and instruct.

Col 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

1 Th 5:14 *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

2 Th 3:15 *Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*

Thought 1. Remember that Paul had never visited the Roman church. He had only met a few of the Roman believers in his travels over the Mediterranean world. What he knew about the Roman believers was only what he had heard about them. Therefore, his writing to them is comparable to a visiting preacher. Note his gracious spirit and attitude toward other believers and congregations. Every minister can learn from this soft, tender spirit of Paul.

Mat 18:4 “Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Luke 22:26 “But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”

Rom 12:3-8 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Phil 2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

1 Tim 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.

1 Pet 5:5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Romans 15: 15 Minister’s Duty: Proclamation of the Truth of the Gospel

The minister of God is bold in reminding people of the great truths of the gospel. Glance at the overall outline of Romans, and you quickly see how Paul has covered the great truths of the Christian faith. This is the task of the minister of God. The minister must proclaim the truths of the gospel — to preach the gospel is the very reason for his call. He exists for no other purpose.

1 Tim 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

2 Cor 5:20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

2 Cor 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Cor 4:1-2 Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

Eph 4:7-8 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”

2 Tim 1:11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.

III. *Romans 15:16 Minister's Duty: Minister the Gospel of God*

The minister of God is called to minister the gospel of God. When Paul called himself a minister (leitourgon), the Greek word was often used to refer to the priests of the Old Testament. This is a beautiful passage describing the nature of the Christian ministry. The Christian ministry is seen as a priestly ministry. However, we must always remember that the ministry is not an office to make atonement for sin, nor to offer an atoning, a propitiatory sacrifice to God. It is a ministry of preaching the gospel under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the ministry is this: to bring men to the point where they will offer themselves as living sacrifices, holy, pleasing to God (see Rom 12:1-2). A minister's only priesthood is the preaching of the gospel, and his only offering is the offering of redeemed and sanctified men to God. He is not a mediator between God and men; he does not offer atoning sacrifices. He is only an instrument which God uses to share the gospel of salvation with men. He is a priest only in the sense that he serves the gospel of God *to men* and brings men to God through the gospel of God.

Note what the "offering" was that God wanted Paul to make: the offering of the Gentiles, of human lives. God wanted Paul to bring people to Him. This is the task of ministers: to offer the lives of men, women, boys and girls to God.

John 15:16 *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."*

Rom 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*

1 Pet 2:5 *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.*

Note: the offering that God wants from ministers, the only offering that is "acceptable," is the offering of human lives. The word *acceptable* is significant. If ministers bring any other offering, it is unacceptable. God is not after buildings, programs, money, equipment or anything else. God is after the lives of people.

The word acceptable means something else as well. It means that the offering of a human life is acceptable only if the person is brought...

- by "the gospel of God" and is "sanctified [set apart to God] by the Holy Spirit."

The good news of God's Son, Jesus Christ, has to be proclaimed and accepted for a person to be acceptable to God. The only person set apart to God by the Holy Spirit is the person who comes to God in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Acts 4:12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

1 Tim 2:5-6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.

IV. Romans 15:17–19 Minister Glories in Christ and Things of God

The minister of God glories only in Christ and in things that pertain to God. Note four facts.

1. Paul talked about and gloried in what Christ had done through him. There is a legitimate boasting, a justified glorying for the minister. However, it is critical to note where. The minister's boasting...

- is not in material things such as buildings, programs, membership and numbers.
- is not in fleshly things such as position, charisma, fluency of speech, education and titles.

Paul demonstrated this fact clearly, for he did not talk about himself nor about what he had done. He talked only about the things that pertained to God, only about the things wrought through Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 1:31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Psa 34:2 My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

Psa 44:8 In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever.

Isa 45:25 But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.

Jer 9:24 But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

2. Paul talked about and gloried in the obedience of converts. Note that the Gentile converts were *accomplished through Christ*, not by Paul. Christ used what Paul said and did to reach the converts, but it was Christ who worked in their hearts to convict and convert them.

The point is this: Paul talked about and shared the glorious news of converts, but he was careful...

- to give all the credit to Christ
- to make no claims that were not true ("I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished")

Rom 12:3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

James 4:10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

Micah 6:8 *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

Prov 11:2 *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*

Prov 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Prov 25:14 *Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.*

James 4:16 *As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.*

1 John 2:16 *For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

3. Paul talked about and gloried in the mighty signs and miracles accomplished by the Holy Spirit. This is a term used in Scripture to refer to the wonderful miracles accomplished by God — miracles which could be accomplished by God. Apparently, Paul had an extensive ministry of both evangelism and healing among people. But note the emphasis: it was all accomplished through the “power of the Spirit [of God].” It was the Holy Spirit who did the miracles (see Acts 13:11; 14:3, 10; 16:18; 19:11; 20:10; 28:5, 8).

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.”*

Acts 4:33 *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.*

Acts 19:11-12 *God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.*

1 Cor 2:4 *My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.*

Eph 3:16 *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.*

Heb 1:5 *For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father?” Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son?”*

2 Tim 1:7 *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

4. Paul talked about and gloried in the fact that he had been given the privilege to *preach the gospel* all around: “from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum” (present day Yugoslavia or Serbia). Note that God had used Paul to preach throughout the world, but note the emphasis: “I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.” It was the gospel of Christ that God wanted the world to hear and receive, not the gospel of Paul. Paul was only the instrument that God used. Paul talked about *the gospel of Christ penetrating and reaching the world*.

Acts 9:20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

1 Cor 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

1 Cor 9:16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

2 Cor 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

V. Romans 15: 20–21 Preaching in Pioneer Areas

The minister of God seeks to preach the gospel in pioneer areas. Note two striking points.

1. Paul strived to reach those who had never heard about Christ. His one ambition was to carry the gospel to those to whom no other preacher had gone. God had called him to be an apostle, a missionary evangelist, not to pastor and to build upon the ministry of other men.
=> Too many in the world had never heard about Christ.
=> Too many were still doomed to die without ever having heard.
=> Too many were to spend eternity apart from God.

Why? Simply because they had never heard. There were not enough ministers going into the pioneer areas and staying with the people long enough to root and grow them in the Lord.

2. Paul strived to fulfil God's call to him by reaching the Gentiles, for God had called him to reach the pioneer areas (Acts 9:15; 22:14-15; 26:15-18). Note: Scripture predicts that the gospel is to be carried to those who “have not heard” (Isa 52:15).

Thought 1. Paul was the first of God's chosen vessels to carry the message to those who had never heard. Tragically, there are still multitudes who have not heard the gospel of Christ and who are dying and will spend eternity apart from God — all because we have not carried the gospel to them.

- => Who will be the “Pauls” of today?
=> Who has the courage to go to the pioneer areas today?
=> Who will reach those who have never even had the opportunity to hear?

Mat 28:19 “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,”

Mark 16:15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Luke 24:47 And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Acts 16:9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

Acts 22:15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

Psa 2:8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

Psa 96:3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. ■