Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

In Defense of Boldness, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 15:14-16
Code: 45-114

Romans chapter 15 is our study for tonight. I want us to look at verses 14 through 21, Romans chapter 15 verses 14 through 21.

As we think about this passage, and I'll get into it in just a moment, there's a key word here. I want you to notice that key word. It's in verse 15, it's the word "boldly." It's the word "boldly." Really verses 14 to 21 is in defense of Paul's boldness. The whole section is written to defend the way in which he spoke to the Romans. You see, he had never been to that church. He did not found that church. He never pastored that church. He did not personally know that church or fellowship with that church. And yet, throughout this tremendous epistle he had spoken to them with great boldness. Very forthrightly, shoulder to shoulder, nose to nose, he had confronted them on some very crucial issues, not the least of which was the matter of the stronger and the weaker in chapters 14 and 15. But he had been very bold in speaking to them and his boldness needs an explanation. How can one whom they have never met who has not founded that church nor pastored that church be so bold with them?

And so he writes this brief section in his epilogue to the great treatise in the epistle which ended in verse 13 and his intent in this section from verses 14 to 21 is to justify his boldness. And it becomes, I believe in my own thinking, a justification for the boldness of anyone who speaks on behalf of the eternal God.

I was speaking with a pastor recently who told me he was...he had the privilege of speaking in our chapel at the college and he told me he was impressed with the attentiveness of the students. He said, "I don't know that I've ever spoken in a college where the students were so attentive to the Word of God." He said, "I spoke recently at another college and," he said, "in that college when I began to speak there was a girl in the back row fixing her hair while I was speaking and she kept doing it. And finally I stopped...and you can imagine this in a college chapel...and said, `Young lady, you in the back fixing your hair, I demand your attention for the Word of the living God.'" And she dropped all of her paraphernalia, slid down and afterward some young man came up to him, he told me, and said, "Sir, you were out of line. You have absolutely no right to demand attention from anyone." To which he replied, "Young man, I don't need you to tell me what right I have or have not, it's not a question of me. But I will tell you this, young man, when the Word of the living God is spoken, you better listen."

Now there is a defense for boldness and Paul gives that kind of defense right here. Now the word "boldness" means not hesitating in the face of danger. It conveys the idea of courage and daring. Certainly this is a word to describe the Apostle Paul. He was a courageous man. He was a daring man. He had a marked and really unusual boldness. He did not back down but rather spoke with great courage. In Acts 9:27 he preached boldly, it says, at Damascus. In Acts 13:46, "Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said it was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you." Chapter 14 verse 3, "Along time therefore abode they," and this speaking again of Paul and his compatriots, "speaking boldly in the Lord." Chapter 19 and verse 8, "And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God."

The testimony of the Holy Spirit in those passages in the books of Acts is that Paul spoke with great courage and great boldness. And he like that preacher I mentioned to you demanded a hearing for the Word of the living God. I mean, if when E.F. Hutton speaks everyone ought to listen, how ought they to listen when God speaks? And this is what he defends in this part of the epistle to the Romans. He was bold. He was forthright. He was unhesitating. He was unflinching in his presentation of the truth and in his contradiction of any sin or any error.

And if we go back in Romans for just a brief look at that, let's look at chapter 6 for a moment. Verse 12 indicates something of his boldness as he speaks to these Christians at Rome and says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your moral body that you should obey in it in its lusts, neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead," and so forth. And then he says in the rest of chapter 6 that since you have been made free from sin in terms of its dominion you ought to yield yourselves, verse 16, as servants to righteousness. This is exhortation.

In chapter 8 we find it again. In verse 9, "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you, now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His," as if to say I don't care what your claims are, if you possess not the Spirit of Christ you do not belong to God. And verse 13, "If you live after the flesh you will die." Very bold, very direct, very forthright. In chapter 11 again beginning at verse 17 he talks about the fact that the branches known as Israel in this analogy were broken off. The trunk of blessing, the Abrahamic covenant, the Gentiles were grafted in. But he says in verse 24, "If thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature and grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? I would not, brethren, you should be ignorant of this mystery lest you should be wise in your own conceit that blindness in part is happened to Israel only until the fullness of the Gentiles come in." Don't get proud because Israel's been put out and you've been brought in to covenant blessing, God is going to bring them back in. And if you who were not the natural branch were put in when they were broken off, don't think smugly that you are secure for you too could be broken off by God's justice in the future. Again a very confrontive word.

Chapter 12 verse 3, another confrontive statement. He tells them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Chapter 13, he begins to talk about the government and he says, "The rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Will you then not be afraid of the power?" In other words, if you're doing evil you ought to fear the power of the government. In chapter 7 he very strongly and resolutely commands them to pay their taxes, rendering tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom is do, fear to whom fear is do, honor to whom honor is due. In verse 8 he says they are to owe man nothing, nothing but love. In verses 11 to 14 they are to get busy, walking, verse 13, honestly, not in wild parties and drunkenness or immorality and so forth and so because verse 12 says the night is far spent and so forth. Very confrontive language, very direct. Chapter 14 is the same. Verse 1, "The one that is weak in the faith receive..." and then he goes on through chapter 15 to discuss the obligation of the strong and the weak.

So here are these confrontive exhortative sections of Romans and some folks in the Roman assembly might be saying, "Where does this guy get this authority? How is it that he is so exercised in his spirit to speak to us in this manner? Where does he come with this boldness?" And he defends his right to that boldness in this section.

The body of the letter is over. It ran from chapter 1 verse 18, after the 17-verse introduction, beginning in verse 18 clear through verse 13 of chapter 15 which we concluded last week. That's the main body which is a beautiful description of salvation by grace through faith with all of its implications. Now in this concluding section, having given them his theology, he gives them his heart. Having described to them his doctrine, he gives them his own soul. Having told them what he believes to be the truth of God, he now tells them some of his own ministry perceptions. And he touches on very personal matters. First the reason for his boldness, as I mentioned, in verses 14 to 21, then his plans for the future, verses 22 to 33, then some personal greetings in chapter 16 and a final benediction at the end of chapter 16 and he's finished.

So, this is all very personal as he gives them his heart. And it's important for him to do that because having written so boldly he doesn't want to ruin the relationship with them before it can even get started. He doesn't want to undermine their association because he wants to go to Spain and he sees this church at Rome as a key point to stop off in, collect some supplies so he can go on and evangelize Spain. And he wants a conciliating spirit, he wants them to know not only his doctrine but his heart so that they will not misjudge his confidence and boldness as if it was insensitivity and an unloving spirit.

So, let's begin then at verse 14 and see how he defends his boldness. Verse 14 says, "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, confident also to admonish one another." Now let's look at that for a minute. That's a very conciliating statement, isn't it? It took him 16 chapters to get around to the amenities, or 15 anyway.

It took him through chapter 15 verse 13 before he really opens up his heart and speaks to them in conciliating terms. And he begins by saying, "And I myself..." in spite of all that I have written, in spite of calling for obedience and holiness and the killing and mortification of sin, in spite of commanding you to pursue righteousness and commit yourself to Christ and use your spiritual gifts and be marked by humility and love without vengeance and love without retaliation, in spite of calling for submission and the love of the weaker brother and to care for each other, in spite of all that, "I myself...I myself." It is my personal opinion, "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you are..." and then he extols them with three virtues. In spite of all that I said I know you are a good people, I know you are a virtuous people. I do not have a low estimate of you.

I feel like Paul does so very often when I've poured out my soul in the sermon and I wonder whether people going away feel like I assume them to be the lowest of the low. That's not so. The exhortation that I give and have given through the years have always been with those who are most dedicated to Christ in mind. When people ask me to whom I preach I always say I preach to the most committed people in the congregation. I'm not interested in scolding the marginal people, I think the Spirit of God will work in their hearts. I am interested in feeding and strengthening and encouraging those who are already committed to the truth of God because they're the strength of the church. And when someone is confronted with the truth, it is not the reflection of a low estimate, it is the reflection, as in the case of Paul, of an estimate that says I know your character and virtue is such that you will take what I say and apply it to the glory of God in your own blessing. So it does not reflect a low estimate.

He even calls them "my brethren," and that indicates the bond that he feels with them. A bond that was really first introduced in chapter 1 verse 8 when he said, "First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." He was commending them even in that verse and now commends them again. And he has strong convictions that three things are true of these people. Now these three would make a sermon in and of themselves, marvelous things. Three commendations that are equalled, I think, in the Scripture only in the commendation to the church at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. This is a marvelous church, this Roman church. You will notice in going through the whole Roman epistle that he doesn't have to treat any given single sin issue because there, perhaps, was no glaring thing which needed direct attention, such as in the case of writing to the Galatians, or to the Corinthians. And his estimate of their virtue is a high estimate, so much so that he warmly commends them for three things.

Look at them in verse 14, marvelous. "You also are full of goodness." That basically means you are rich in moral character, you are rich in moral excellence which is always the work of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, same term, goodness. That means moral excellence. That means the virtue that is opposed to all evil. They hated evil. They hated sin. And they loved righteousness. They were able to do what chapter 12 verse 21 said to overcome evil with good. They were a virtuous church...kindness, generosity, moral purity in their word, moral purity in their action was characteristic of this church. They were not spiritually deficient in their character.

They had given abundant evidence of their true salvation. They were those who had been the workmanship of God, created in Christ unto good works which God before ordained that they should walk in them, Ephesians 2:10. They were manifesting that, they were doing good things. And he said, "Not only that, you are full of goodness." You are a church characterized by moral virtue.

Now this does not mean they were perfect or without sin, else would all the exhortations of Romans been useless. They were not perfect but they were good, they were morally excellent, they were committed a quality Christian experience. They had much. They are reminiscent of the Apostle's words to the Colossians in chapter 1. He says in verse 3, "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have to all the saints and the hope which is laid up for you in heaven of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." And he goes on to talk about what a good group they are. But he also begins in verse 9, "Because of this we do not cease to pray for you and desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might," and on and on and on.

In other words, you're...you're a great church, we pray you'll even be a greater one. And so the idea here is that Paul sees in them a fullness of goodness that is not perfection. There is room for improvement but is a mark of their spiritual virtue. This is a commendation that is genuine and true but does not preclude Paul's prior exhortation. And I can say the same to you, you are a church full of goodness and that is not to say there is not necessity for greater goodness, the two go hand in hand.

The second commendation he gives, not only were they full of goodness but they were filled with all knowledge. Paul is generous with his terms here. The word "filled" is a verb, passive verb, having been filled with. They had received all knowledge. They not only were a good church but they were doctrinally sound. They were theologically sound. And here is this beautiful balance of virtue and truth that we have been seeing in our studies of 1 Timothy where it talks about holding a true faith and a pure conscience. Truth and virtue go together. And here is a church that has both true and virtue. The virtue is in the term goodness. The truth is in the terms all knowledge. Spiritual knowledge, practical application of that knowledge was theirs. They had that possession. They knew God. They knew His revealed truth. They were able to stand on that. And they were in that beautiful balance that God would have His church possess of truth and purity, moral excellence and spiritual knowledge, grasp of the truth and goodness of the heart. As I said from 1 Timothy, "Faith and a good conscience." That's a beautiful beautiful combination for which there is no equal.

Now for every believer...listen carefully...for every believer that is a possibility. By virtue of the Spirit of God given to us we can know true goodness. We can hate sin and love righteousness. We can have the fruit of the Spirit, and as Paul said to the Colossians, "Be filled with all the fruits of

righteousness," we can, we should be. And we can have all knowledge for Christ is to us knowledge and wisdom and in Him, Paul says to the Colossians, are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We can have these two. We ought to have these two. They're substantive, they're basic to the life of the church, and this church had those things...moral excellence and spiritual knowledge.

As a result of that, you will notice at the end of verse 14 a very important statement. "Since you are full of goodness and filled with all knowledge, you are able also to admonish one another." You are competent to admonish. In fact, we could translate it, "you are competent to counsel...you are competent to counsel." They can act without Paul, is what he is saying. You can act without me. With all you know, having all knowledge revealed by God, with all you are having true goodness of life, you are able to counsel one another. You are able to admonish one another. And the word here is noutheteo, it means to lead someone away from a false path into a true path by warning and teaching. It's a comprehensive word for counseling. And, of course, in our particular culture today we hear so much about who is competent to counsel. And there are those people who would tell us that the only ones competent to counsel are worldly trained psychiatrists and psychologists. I heard that day after day after day after day during the trial of the law suit in which I was engaged, that people in the ministry are utterly incompetent to counsel, that there's no way we can handle quote/unquote "psychological problems," that there are problems far beyond the purview of anyone, treating it with the Word of God, you have to know Freud, you have to know Karl Rogers, you have to know Yung, you've got to know all this and have all kinds of worldly information in order to deal with people's problems. But what the Scripture says here is if you have all knowledge of the revelation of God and your life is characterized by being full of moral purity, you are competent to counsel, in spite of what the world may say. And it's tragic that even in some church circles and some theological circles and within some Christian institutions, the line has been sent out that no one without worldly humanistic psychological training is competent to counsel...and that's not true. We are competent to admonish one another within the family of God based upon the quality of our life and the knowledge of the revelation of God.

Paul says you don't even need me. In the early church at Rome they didn't have a psychiatrist, they didn't have a psychologist, they didn't have a therapist, nobody had clinical experience. And they were in...they were in a city that was perhaps like any other major city in the world in our own times, cosmopolitan, replete with every imaginable human drama, traumatized in every dimension, but because they were filled with true goodness and the knowledge of God's truth, they were qualified to counsel.

I was thrilled when Larry Crabbe(?) who is a well-known Christian counselor, perhaps writing the most significant things today on the subject, came to our chapel and the college and said, "There is no such thing as a psychological problem. All problems are either spiritual or physical. Anyone who says there is a psychological problem somewhere in the middle that isn't either physical or spiritual has a low view of sin, doesn't understand what sin is." Furthermore he said, secondly, "The first thing

you have to realize is there's no psychological problem, everything is rooted in man's sinfulness. The second thing you have to realize is...and he says this as a psychologist with a Ph.D....the Word of God is utterly sufficient." That's the word he kept using...the Word of God is utterly sufficient. And the third thing he said is that the well being of people occurs within the community of the church...within the mutual love and care and ministry of the church.

Whatever kind of counseling needed to be done at Rome the people were able to do it. They didn't need Paul. They didn't need an out-of-town expert. In the normal course of the life of the church, the believers could counsel one another because problems were related to the spiritual. And problems of the spiritual nature are resolved in the sufficiency of Scripture and in the corporate love and support of the community of redeemed people.

In Colossians there's a beautiful description of how this function of the church works. And Phillip's translation really captures it, let me read it to you, Colossians 3:12 to 17, he writes, "As 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 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 true wisdom, teach and help one another along the right road." And we could substitute the word, "Counseling through your psalms and hymns and Christian songs, singing God's praises with joyful hearts."

Wow! You see, everything happens within the fellowship. And sometimes the greatest counseling there is is just singing praises. And then the final verse in Colossians 3 verse 17, "Whatever work you may have to do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, thanking God the Father through Him."

You see, if I may beg the point for a moment, sound counseling is not sitting in an office with someone who collects $75 to $100 for 45 minutes of telling you nothing and reciting back to you just what you said. I've talked with so many people who have gone through that...so many people. The place is the church, the source is the Word of God, the counselors are the people of God who are saved, who are filled with goodness, who are filled with knowledge, the rich knowledge of Christ's Word, giving them wisdom...the normal functioning of the life of the church where we stimulate one another to love and good works, Hebrews 10. There's no secret mysterious field of mystery that no one can figure out. Christians whose lives are right and know the truth of God are competent to share that truth out of a pure life and be used by God to help others.

So, the Roman church was solid, commendable church, commendable church. "Then why write them? I mean, if they're such a good church why are you writing them?"

Well let's look at verse 15 and see what he says. "Nevertheless, brethren, nevertheless I have written the more boldly." In spite of the fact that you're such a good group, I've still written the more boldly unto you in some sort as putting you in mind and the reason is because of the grace that is given to me of God. You know why I did this? Listen to this. You know why...you know why I wrote you like this? I'm under mandate. I mean, I did this because God made me do it. That's right. I'm under mandate.

Verse 15 is interesting. "Nevertheless, in spite of how good you are, brethren," again he emphasizes that comradery, "I have written the more boldly," which is to say rather boldly, or more boldly than perhaps you think I ought to have written, not knowing you and you not knowing me, "but I have done it unto you in some sort..." that literally means in parts of the letter, "in parts of the letter I've been very bold, I know that, but I've done it as putting you in mind." What does that mean? To do what? To remind you...to remind you...to remind you. I know your spiritual quality but I also know you're not all you could be because I know my spiritual quality and I know I'm not all I could be either. So I want to remind you. And that is really what the mandate is all about. He wrote Romans not to tell them something they didn't know but to remind them of things they did know. Not because they were an ill-equipped and weak church but because they were a well-equipped and strong church, not because they were vacillating carnal Christians but because they were uncompromising strong Christians but there was still much to remind them of.

You remember how Paul tells Timothy to keep teaching sound doctrine over and over and reminding the people and nourishing them in it. And you remember how Peter writes in 2 Peter 1 and says, "I keep telling you these things so that after I'm gone you'll hear their echo the rest of your life." I want you to remember. I want you to remember. You see, any good teacher knows two things. Two things you have to recognize in teaching. One is familiarity and the other is forgetfulness. Those are two things we have to take in to account. I realize the principle of forgetfulness. That is to say what I have said in the past you have already forgotten. I don't like that principle but it's true. If I were to quiz you on this morning's service, I don't want to do that because I don't want to see your answers, but I realize what I have said you have forgotten. You know how I know that? Because what I've said I've forgotten...and people sometimes say, "Do you ever listen to your tapes?" And I have a standard answer, "Only to find out what I believe on things." And that's the truth because I can't remember how I interpret a passage either, if you go back far enough. So we do tend to forget. And any good teacher knows that you must repeat things. That's why throughout the teaching of our Lord there is the repetition of many great truths. And the same with Paul. His epistles intersect over and over again with the same truth. You have to understand forgetfulness.

The second thing you have to understand is familiarity. While reminding them you cannot say things in the way you've always said them or they don't hear them because the terminology is so familiar they think they understand what you're saying and it's water off the duck's back. So the challenge of teaching is to repeat to your people the same stuff over and over again in ways they think they've never heard. Now you know. That's the big secret. But that's the challenge. People say, "Do you use notes when you preach?" Of course I use notes, if I didn't I'd revert back to saying the same thing in the same way every week and you'd all be gone. And so in order to stay fresh, that's the challenge of the ministry, that's what puts me in the study 30 hours a week...to stay fresh so that what I say to you, though we may understand the general truth, comes to you in terms you've not heard before in passages you've not studied before.

And so the Apostle Paul says, "The challenge, you see, with you is to remind you of what you already know," just as it was for Paul to tell Timothy, "Keep reminding those people of sound doctrine," for Peter to say, "I'm giving you these things over and over that you might remember them even when I'm gone." And the reason I'm doing it all and this ministry of reminder is going on, the end of verse 15, is because of the grace that is given to me of God. God's called me to this. You can study God's grace in the Scripture and you'll find there is electing grace, we're elect by His grace. There is saving grace, we're saved by His grace. In fact, electing grace is in Romans 11:5, saving grace is in Romans 5:21. You can study calling grace, the effectual call comes by grace, Galatians 1:15. Forgiving grace, Ephesians 1:7; comforting grace, 2 Thessalonians 2:16; standing grace, Romans 5:2; but here we have, if you will, apostolic grace...the grace of a divine mandate to proclaim the truth.

I mean, the issue here wasn't that he wrote this letter to the Romans simply because he thought the Romans needed it, or simply because he wanted to establish a relationship with them, the issue was he was under divine orders, he was under divine compulsion. This is more than just a personal desire. This is the calling of God, this is the calling of God. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15 you remember what he says in giving his testimony, Paul says, "I am the least of the Apostles, not even fit to be called an Apostle because I persecuted the church of God, but I am an Apostle (implied) by the grace of God," verse 10, "by the grace of God I am what I am and His grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain because I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I but the grace of God which was with me." So the thing that energized his ministry was God's outpoured grace. And by that he means the power and flow of the energy of God that compelled him to serve which he saw as grace because it was undeserved, because he was unworthy of it.

And he's right back to what we've been talking about. Last Lord's day in the morning in Timothy he had a duty. He was under obligation. This was the cause of his ministry. I have spoken to you more boldly than you might have expected me to speak, I have spoken to you more directly than you might have anticipated I should speak, and the reason I've done that is because there's a grace of God that infuses my life that compels me to speak the way I speak.

I understand that. I don't understand it in the dimension of the Apostle Paul but I understand it in the terms of my own life. I understand the compulsion of ministry. I understand what Paul had in mind in 2 Corinthians, I think, in chapter 5 where he says in verse 14, "For the love of Christ constrains us." I understand that. I understand what he means in verse 11 of that chapter knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men. I understand what he said in 1 Corinthians 9, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." I am compelled. There is a constraint upon me. I understand that. And so does anyone who is called. And listen to this, so should any believer with whatever his or her spiritual gift might be understand that same compulsion. For all of us have been given gifts from the Spirit of God which the Spirit of God by grace compels to be used. And a committed Christian understands that duty.

So, in defense of boldness Paul says if you're going to be upset, don't be upset with me, call heaven, I'm under orders. I mean, after all, he really didn't write Romans on his own, did he? Was it not that he was compelled by the Spirit of God? In Romans 1:1 he identifies himself in the opening of the letter, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ called to be an Apostle and separated unto the gospel of God." And in verse 5, "By whom we have received grace and apostleship." You see, God graciously made him an Apostle, he's under mandate. He has a duty. And this is a compelling thing with him, as it must be with anyone who speaks on behalf of the Lord.

Now having introduced this gracious apostolic calling, he then does a wonderful thing. He defines that apostolic office as a three-fold role. And I want you to look at it. And we won't get through it tonight, but we'll at least introduce the first one. It is a three-fold role that the Apostle Paul plays. Number one, Paul the priest. Number two, Paul the preacher. And number three, Paul the pioneer. He introduces himself as a priest, a preacher and a pioneer. And these things sum up that wonderful sense of the gracious call of God which compelled him to be an Apostle and to pen the epistle to the Romans.

Now first of all he is Paul the priest. In looking at this office he sees himself analogous to a priest. Please notice the choice of words. He is not in strict definition a priest. But his role is analogous to a priest. That is, it can be illustrated in priestly terms. Verse 16, "The calling of God, the grace of God was in order that I should be the leitourgos," that word really means one who renders priestly service, "of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, offering up the gospel of God, like a priest would, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable being sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

Now that verse gets kind of confusing, so let's look at it bit by bit. He says, first of all, the calling of God on my life by grace was that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Now the key to understanding this particular point is to understand the term minister. It can refer to a civil office, he uses it that way in chapter 13 verse 6 when he talks about the civil authorities in the government. It can refer to a civil authority. But most significantly and frequently the term refers to sacred worship or service and the context here indicates that that is its proper use in this text,

leitourgosis one who performs a public service, particularly a service of worship to God. So he sees himself then in a priestly role.

This, by the way, is the use of this term in many places in the New Testament, many places. Zecharias the father of John the Baptist was a priest and this term is used of his ministry in Luke 1:21 to 23. So there you have a typical priestly use of this word. You have another use of it in a similar way in a priestly kind of form in Acts 13:2 where it talks about the pastors at Antioch who were ministering to the Lord and fasting. And again here they are appearing as priests offering sacrifices of prayer and praise to the Lord. It's used in Philippians 2:17, it's used in Hebrews 1:7 and 14, it's used in Hebrews 8:2 and 6, Hebrews 9:21, Hebrews 10:11 and in all of those uses it has a priestly kind of identity.

So the Apostle then is saying I am a priest...notice this...I am like a priest of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, a priest offering to God an act of worship. Now the statement "ministering the gospel of God" which comes next solidifies the priestly interpretation of the word "minister" because this word must mean, it's only used here, and it must mean to serve as a priest. That's what it means. So I am a priest to the Gentiles, priest of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, serving as a priest in the gospel of God.

Now listen carefully. This is not to say he's an actual priest. We would not for a minute want to say that this is the institution of a priesthood, a formal priesthood. All believers, beloved, are...what?...are priests. I'm a priest, you're a priest. You say, "Are you sure about that?" Yes, all believers are priests. In 1 Peter 2:5, "You also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices." Verse 9, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own that you should show forth the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." All believers are priests. That is what we have said historically in our own faith that we believe in the priesthood of believers. We are all believer priests. That is to say we do not have to go through some other mediary to get to get to God, right? We don't go through some human person.

In Revelation 1:6, "He has made us kings and priests unto God." We are priests. We do not need priests to get to God. All of us are priests. In fact, in Revelation 20 verse 6, "They shall be priests of God and of Christ and reign with Him a thousand years," it says of those in the Kingdom. So all believers are priests.

We're not saying here then that Paul and other Apostles are elevated to some level of being priests. Technically he's not a priest at all. But his role is analogous to the function of a priest. That is it can be illustrated in those terms. We don't need a man to be a mediator. First Timothy 2:5 says there is one mediator between God and man...who is that? The man Christ Jesus. So we go directly to God through Christ. We don't need a human intermediary, we don't need a saint, we don't need anyone.

We are all believer priests. Making certain men priests and calling them priests is a misrepresentation and a violation of the priesthood of the believers and breaks against the truth of the Word of God.

So, Paul is not a priest who makes atonement for sin. He is not a priest who offers a propitiatory sacrifice. He is not a priest who mediates between God and man. Only by way of illustration does he call himself a priest because he wants the Romans and us to understand what he does. Like a priest, he says, back to verse 16, who offers up the Gentiles. He is pictured here as a priest serving Jesus Christ in the gospel of God, he calls it the gospel of God in chapter 1 also, and in serving in the gospel of God, the offering that he brings is the offering up of the Gentiles and he brings us an acceptable offering which has been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. This is absolutely thrilling terminology.

Here is Paul and the image of his ministry is that he's a priest. And he stands before the altar of God and he has in his hands an offering. And look what the offering is. The offering is the Gentiles. Marvelous. The offering is the Gentiles. What Gentiles? The Gentiles who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit and been made acceptable to God, saved Gentiles. Now when Paul was called into the ministry, he was told he was going to be an Apostle to the Gentiles. He went out and won Gentiles to Christ. Saved Gentiles then, in a sense, Paul has collected in his ministry and like a priest he offers them to God. They are his act of personal worship. Beautiful picture...beautiful picture. How different from the Levitical function in the old covenant. His priestly service to God is the offering up of the Gentiles. That is to say that you and I as priests offer God an offering and a most fitting and beautiful offering would be to offer to God the souls of those that we have led to Jesus Christ. You see? That's the picture.

And someone might say, "Well, are the Gentiles acceptable?" So he says the offering up of the Gentiles is acceptable because they've been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Acceptable means well pleasing, truly saved. These are truly saved Gentiles. They are acceptable to God because they've been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament no sacrifice could be offered to God until it had been properly cleansed...properly purified. And no sacrifice can be offered to God, no offering can be offered to Him now unless it's acceptable. And how is it acceptable? Only when it's cleansed. You can't offer to God unregenerate Gentiles or unregenerate Jews. You offer to God those that are acceptable because they've been cleansed by the washing of the water through the Word and the agency of the Holy Spirit. Read Titus 3 verses 4 to 7...the renewing of the Holy Spirit, the washing of regeneration that makes a man or a woman acceptable unto God.

So the Gentiles who truly believe, the Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus Christ through the ministry of Paul are like a great offering that he's gathered together and he gives that offering to God. Somebody might want to say...some Jew might want to say, "Well, Gentiles aren't acceptable, they're like Cain's offering. God doesn't accept it." Not so. Through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit,

Gentiles also are made clean from sin and have become acceptable to God. That was clear in Acts, wasn't it? You remember the testimony of Acts 15 verses 6 to 9, how that God had visited the Gentiles to take out a people for His name? God had cleansed the Gentiles to take out a people. You remember the testimony of Peter earlier in the book of Acts, how he says, "The Spirit fell on the Gentiles, the same as on the Jews." Yes, they were made acceptable by faith in Christ.

So, here we see Paul the priest. And as a priest he presents his offering to God, a spotless sanctified group of Gentiles washed in the water of regeneration, cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ through saving faith. And this, beloved, this is the only priesthood there is in the new covenant. It's the priesthood of Christian ministry. Not to offer atonement for sin but by preaching the gospel of God to unsaved people, winning them to Christ, we then offer them back to Him as an acceptable offering.

I couldn't help but going through that ask myself, what are you offering God? Do you have any such spiritual sacrifice to hold up to His altar? Paul is bold. He's bold because he's under mandate. He's bold because he's trying to win the Gentiles to Christ. And he says I'm carrying out my commission. I want you to understand my theology. I want you to understand my heart. So when I come there and I want to go on to Spain, as he says in verses 24 and 28, you'll support me so I can reach more Gentiles because God has called me to be like a priest who offers these Gentiles to Him.

I'll tell you, it's a thrilling thing, it's a thrilling thing when someone comes to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and you can take that someone and offer them to God as a sweet smelling sacrifice. And when you have that privilege, there's no privilege like it. I was thrilled to hear about the young people committing themselves to evangelism. And I praise God that even I have those kinds of opportunities. On Sunday morning when I'm over in the fellowship area, we're meeting the first-time visitors, I talk to them as they go by. And a pastor was visiting us and he said to me, "What do you do over there?"

I said, "Well, we just meet our first-time people."

He said, "Well, what do you say to them?"

"Well, I introduce myself to them and then we try to find out whether they really know Christ."

He said, "How do you do that? How do you find that out?"

I said, "I ask them."

He said, "What do you say?"

I said, "I say to them, `It's a pleasure to meet you. By the way, do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?' I might say, `Do you know Christ? Are you a Christian?'"

He says, "You mean you just...you ask them that?"

I said, "Yes, I ask them that."

He said, "Are they offended?"

I said, "I've been doing this, I don't know, six years. I've never had anyone say they were offended." I'm sure there are people who are offended but this is a church, they expect to get asked that. And then we see people come to Christ. And what a joy to be able to lift that up.

I went to visit a man who is dying of terminal cancer. He and his wife didn't know the Lord. Somebody said, "Would you go visit them?" A few days ago, two weeks I guess now. I went in and I shared with them and talked with them and I had met them before but they don't come to church here. And I said to him, "Well, you're facing death. What are your thoughts?"

He said, "Well, I'm going to go to heaven."

I said, "You are?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "How do you know that?"

He said, "Because I'm a good person...I'm a good person." He said, "In fact, I know I'm the kind of person God would want in heaven."

And I understood what he meant because he was a good person. He was nice to his family and his wife and he was a good man, an honorable man. And I said, "Well that's good." I said, "You know, I think God appreciates human goodness more than He appreciates human evil." So I said, "That's good." I said, "How good are you?"

"Well, I don't know."

"Well, let's see how good you are." I opened my Bible to Matthew chapter 5 and I said, "I want to tell you about the scribes and the Pharisees, how good they were." And I described them and all their law keeping and their alms and all they did. And then I read Matthew 5 verse 21 where Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never enter heaven." I said, "Now those were the best people on earth and they didn't get there."

He said, "Well, how good do you have to be?"

So I went over to verse 48 and I read this, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." I said, "Are you perfect?"

He said, "No."

I said, "Then you're not good enough." I said, "I'm glad for your goodness but have you sinned? Have you sinned in your life?"

He said, "Yes...yes."

I said, "Well then let's just set your goodness aside and ask this question: what are we going to do about your sin? What are we going to do about your sins? You see, one sin would stain God's holy heaven. What are we going to do with your sin?" I said, "You've sinned all your life long, haven't you?"

He said, "Yes." And began to weep.

I said, "You see, it isn't a question of your goodness, it's a question of what are we going to do about your sin." And he acknowledged his sin. And then I went into a full explanation of the fact that Christ came, died on the cross, paid the penalty for sin, and that Jesus Christ would forgive his sin and then we could take care of the real problem which was his sin and then he would have the confidence that he could enter heaven. I got all done with the presentation of Christ and I said, "Would you like to receive forgiveness for your sin?"

By this time he was weeping. He said, "Oh yes." His wife was sitting there, she said, "Could I also?" And she was weeping. And I said yes. And they wanted to pray and they prayed the prayers of confession and asked God to forgive by the grace of Christ their sins. And that day they were wonderfully redeemed. And then he said to me, "Would you do my funeral because you'll be able to tell the people what's happened in my life?" And unless the Lord intervenes, it will occur in weeks to come. But I walked away from there...Patricia had been waiting in the car and I was sharing it with her and I was just feeling in my own heart this incredible exhilaration of being present when someone is born into the Kingdom of God, and especially someone who is on the brink of eternity. And in line with how you look at this passage tonight, you see yourself in that situation as being able to take those lives, not by anything you've done but by the grace of God given to you, and offering them up as a gift of praise to God.

And having had that experience so freshly in my mind, I've looked back on the times of my life when I would have wanted to go into His presence but I was empty handed. I had no one to offer. It impels

my own heart to be a priest like Paul, and I trust it impels your heart, too, who is concerned to be offering up to God those that have embraced Christ through the grace that God has given to allow you to speak the gospel to them. Marvelous...marvelous joy. Paul says, "I'm sorry for my boldness, but I have to tell you, I live to be a priest to offer up redeemed souls to God as my supreme act of worship." Can you understand that? And that's why he was bold because he so sought that end...Paul the priest.

Father, we thank You tonight that You've been with us. What a wonderful evening. We've shared with our young people, with those of like precious faith around us. How we rejoice at what You're doing in our fellowship. And, Lord, we want to be bold. We want to have the courage to speak a word for you. Lord, how much opportunity we waste. Help me...help me, Lord, to be bold, to be ready to speak that word that is fitting in the right place at the right time that ministers grace to the hearer, even the grace of salvation. And may all of us in this congregation have the joy of offering up to You like a spiritual priest those who by Your grace we have seen come to faith. Make us faithful priests in that regard. We'll thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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