

Romans

15:14-22



**PAUL'S
MINISTRY**



Romans

15:14-22



Introduction

In this section, Paul's overall purpose is to outline his past missionary conduct leading up to the present. This serves to provide a more detailed explanation of why Paul has not yet been to Rome, something that he alluded to in 1:13. The most striking theological feature that stems from this section is the numerous theological terms Paul uses to describe his ministry. He begins, however, by characterizing the previous content of his letter and its intended impact upon his audience. Now that they have reached this point, Paul hopes to bring the Roman Christians along as partners in his future work.

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*Assessing
the Believers
in Rome*

Reflections on Romans: The People and the Letter (vv. 14-15)

*¹⁴Now I have been persuaded and remain convinced, **my brothers**, even I myself, concerning you that you yourselves also are full of goodness, having been filled with all knowledge and remaining so, while also being able to admonish one another.*

Paul begins this section with an emphatic address concerning himself! He combines the first person singular perfect form of the Greek verb τέτεισμαι (*to persuade*), which he previously used in 8:38 and 14:14; together, with a redundant self-identifier, **“I myself”** also used previously in 7:25. Note that he addresses the house-churches in Rome as **“my brothers”** and speaks of them as **“being able to admonish one another”** (νουθετέω – *to instruct, to put on the mind; literally, to instruct and exhort one to spiritual maturity*) which proves that he is including all believers in Rome (the “weak” and “strong”).

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St. Paul then makes a general assessment of his “*brothers*” as being “*full of **goodness***” and “*having been filled with all **knowledge** and remaining so.*” This is opposite to how Paul has portrayed unbelievers in 1:29.

Thus, the opposite for his “*brothers*” in Rome now stands true. “**Goodness**” is the quality which will constrain the “*strong*” to refrain from what will injure the “*weak.*”

And the attainment of “**knowledge**” is that quality which will correct the “*weak*” in their fellowship with the “*strong.*”

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The Letter

So Far

Reflections on Romans: The People and the Letter (vv. 14-15)

***15**But I wrote to you rather boldly in part as repeatedly reminding you on account of the grace having been given to me by God...*

The beginning of this verse refers to Paul's letter up to this point, but note that he isn't conveying any sort of reflective apprehension. Instead, Paul's statement exudes the confidence of 1:16! Thus, Paul is writing powerfully (*remember, he is under inspiration of the Holy Spirit*) about the blessed Holy Gospel – its power and life changing implications! Then, as it is true today, the necessity to constantly remind believers about the essentials of the faith remains paramount in Christianity.

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The Letter
So Far

Reflections on Romans: The People and the Letter (vv. 14-15)

15But I wrote to you rather boldly in part as repeatedly reminding you on account of the grace having been given to me by God...

The notion that Paul must be “*repeatedly reminding you*” (ἐπαναμνησκῶν) points back to explain the spiritual purpose for which Paul has written his letter. However, this Greek participle also pivots forward as Paul will now proceed to direct attention toward himself! The major element that Paul will apply so as to remind is: “*the grace having been given to me.*” He has already applied this same phrase to himself in 12:3. Paul, nonetheless, does not mean that general Divine grace that underlies and empowers all of Christian existence; but, that special gift of grace (“*by God*” – ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ) which called and established Paul as an apostle (cf. 1:5).

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Paul's Priestly Ministry

¹⁶so that I am a *minister* of Christ Jesus toward the Gentiles, performing priestly service [for] the Good News of God in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been consecrated and remaining holy by the Holy Spirit.

The Greek construction that Paul uses expresses purpose or result, though, likely, it is a merging of both! Primarily, however, Paul articulates one result of the grace of God here in v.16 as he begins to describe his priestly ministry.

The title that Paul begins to discuss: **λειτουργός** (“*minister*”) has already been expounded upon by Paul in 13:6, it’s only other appearance in Romans. While it made a “*left-kingdom*” appearance in 13:6 (Paul discussing government officials); yet, here, Paul is using “*minister*” in the right-kingdom Biblical use. In other words, the Biblical use is of a called minister who is to perform Divine Service, where God bestows His saving grace upon His beloved people!

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Paul's Priestly Ministry

¹⁶so that I am a *minister* of Christ Jesus toward the Gentiles, *performing priestly service* [for] *the Good News of God* in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been consecrated and remaining holy by the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul is a *“minister”* especially, though by no means exclusively, toward Gentiles. As God has called Paul (Acts 9:15; cf. Rom 1:5; Gal 1:6) he was given a special responsibility for Gentiles: a call the Jerusalem apostles duly recognized (Gal 2:1-10).

It should be noted that the Greek participle for *“performing priestly service”* (ἱερουργέω) does not occur anywhere else in the NT, but since it is a compound word of *“Temple”* (ἱερός) and *“work”* or *“service”* (ἔργον), it readily conveys the sense of doing priestly activity or *“Temple-work.”* The specific content of Paul’s priestly service is *“the Good News of God.”*

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However, unlike an OT priest, Paul does not sacrifice sheep, goats, bull, etc., but his sacrifice is *“in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been consecrated and remaining holy by the Holy Spirit.”*

Verses 25 and 26 will reveal to us that this sacrifice is subjective! Paul's goal is that this monetary offering or service for the believers in Jerusalem *“might be acceptable”* (εὐπρόσδεκτος) to the holy ones there (v.31).

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There is another interpretation that fits quite nicely within the context that Paul has been discussing with regard to the Gentiles becoming acceptable to God for the sake of His Son, Jesus. This is revealed by the statement, **“having been consecrated and remaining holy by the Holy Spirit.”** Such a clause would not naturally address a monetary gift, but a much greater gift: the Gentiles! This concluding clause is describing people; rather, than a money offering.

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¹⁶so that I am a *minister* of Christ Jesus toward the Gentiles, performing priestly service [for] the Good News of God in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been consecrated and remaining *holy by* the Holy Spirit.

Recall that the OT quite often refers to Israel as “*holy*” or “*sanctified*,” that is, having been set apart and consecrated as the people who belong to the Holy Triune God (Is 6:3). In OT theology of the sanctuary and the priesthood, as well as in many NT verses, such holiness and sanctification refers, first of all, to salvation, to justification with the forgiveness of sins through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ; and then also to the holy manner of life of the redeemed. As we have studied, Paul now depicts the same for Gentiles as they have also been consecrated and remain *holy* by the instrumental power of *the Holy Spirit*.

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Once again, the Greek noun **ἀγιάζω** (*to make holy, consecrate, sanctify*) is of vast importance for us. In this verse is it a perfect participle middle/passive verb (**ἡγιασμένη**), that, as you should always remember, points to God's actions...yes, it's a Divine Passive!!! Thus, Paul is depicting the Gentiles being made holy by the Holy Spirit; it is God, the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies Gentiles, cleansing them from unclean creatures to **"holy"** offerings fit for service and praise of the Holy Triune God. Our Lutheran Confessions offers this summary:

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¹⁶so that I am a *minister* of Christ Jesus toward the Gentiles, performing priestly service [for] the Good News of God in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, *having been consecrated and remaining holy by the Holy Spirit.*

“The offerings of the sons of Levi (that is, of those who teach in the New Testament) are the proclamation of the Gospel and its good fruits. Thus Paul speaks in Rom 15:16 of ‘the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit,’ that is, so that the Gentiles may become offerings acceptable to God through faith” (Ap XXIV 34).

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Paul's Boast

¹⁷Therefore I have this **boast in Christ Jesus** with reference to the things pertaining to God.

The final phrase in this verse can mean literally, *“the things toward God;”* thus, to all that Paul is before God and everything he does in God’s name. Here it refers, expressly, to what Paul describes in v.16, his ministry to the Gentiles in his priestly role of serving them the Good News of God. The noun **“boast”** (καύχησιν) only appears in Romans here and in 3:27 (where such an attitude was excluded). Conversely, the critical matter does not involve whether one boasts or not, but on what basis! In regard to the Law of works, boasting is properly excluded (3:27). But, **“to boast”** **“in Christ Jesus”** is a proper Christian activity. And the **“boast”** is on account of the grace given by God (v.15). Paul grounds his **“boast”** exclusively **“in Christ Jesus”** (cf. 1Cor 1:31).

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Paul's Responsive Hearing

¹⁸Indeed, I will not dare to speak anything of things which Christ Jesus did not accomplish through me toward the responsive hearing of Gentiles, by word and work, ¹⁹by [the] power of signs and miracles, in [the] power of the Spirit of God...

So the question may arise: “What is the primary purpose Christ Jesus sought to accomplish through Paul?” The Greek noun for “*responsive hearing*” (ὕπακοή) is the key and it’s no accident. Literally, this work means “submission to what is heard; obedience as the response to someone speaking.” This can refer to a human voice; but most often, it is obedience to the Lord’s voice (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5 and 1 Pet 1:2). This is Paul’s conviction, which our Lord sought to accomplish through Paul, that the Gentiles would respond to the Law and Gospel being proclaimed by Him through St. Paul! Thus, the proclamation of our Lord seeks a responsive hearing and when this happens, “*the Word of Christ*” accomplishes its goal by creating a responsive faith (cf. 10:17)!

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15:18b-19



*Five
Means to
an End*

^{18b} ...by word and work, ^{19b} by [the] power of signs and miracles, in [the] power of the Spirit of God...

Paul now lists five means in which our Lord Jesus accomplishes His Divine goal and the first pair is: “...by word and work.” This first pair does apply to Paul’s ministry and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles clearly describes numerous examples. It’s important for you to understand that the word “work” (ἔργω) does not permit the notion of works righteousness, but denotes action as opposite to speech. Another translation of this Greek noun would be “deed!”

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Five
Means to
an End

¹⁹by [the] power of signs and miracles, in [the] power of the Spirit of God...

The second pair is: “by [the] power of signs and miracles.” These two attest to the mighty workings of the Holy Spirit who accomplished and, thereby, confirmed the authenticity of Paul’s ministry. As we may recall, these “*signs and miracles (or wonders)*” was a reoccurring theme throughout the Books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Nehemiah, the Psalms, and Jeremiah. Therefore, as in the OT, Paul’s “*signs and miracles*” refer to the miracles that attested to the truth of the Gospel proclamation.

The fifth and final means is “in [the] power of the Spirit of God.” This encompasses all the means of ministry that Paul has identified. As stated at the end of v.13, all this happens and is only possible in, with, and by the power of the Gospel of the Holy Spirit!

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The Extent and Emphasis of Paul's Ministry Method (vv. 19b-22)

...with the result that I have brought to completion and now finished [proclaiming] the Good News of the Christ from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum, ²⁰and thus while striving eagerly to bring the Good News not where Christ was [already] named in order that I might not build upon another's foundation. ²¹But just as it stands written: "[Those] to whom it was not announced about him, they will see, and the ones who have not heard, they will understand." ²²Therefore also I have repeatedly been hindered many times from coming to you.

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Geography

^{19b} ...with the result that I have brought to completion and now finished [proclaiming] the Good News of the Christ from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum,



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Paul's
Modus
Operandi

²⁰and thus while striving eagerly to bring the Good News not where Christ was [already] named in order that I might not build upon another's foundation. ²¹But just as it stands written: "[Those] to whom it was not announced about him, they will see, and the ones who have not heard, they will understand."

Paul describes the manner in which he brings the Good News to the Gentiles. It's as if he is a "trail-blazing pioneer" going to places where "no one has gone before" (yep, I am a trekkie!) or where the Word of God had not yet been proclaimed. So that Paul could avoid possible rivalries, he was called to journey to these places for the sake of the Gospel; so, in reality, Paul is clearly showing his evangelistic fervor of his apostolic calling (see e.g., Acts 9 and 26; Rom 1:1, 16; 1 Cor. 9:16-18; and 2 Cor. 10:15-16).

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You should note that at the end of v.20, Paul, once again, uses the imagery of building. Paul saw it as his role to lay the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ upon which other called servants could build upon. Clearly, Paul laid a deep and stable foundation (in reality by the power of the Holy Spirit), as his year and a half stay in Corinth and his two year stay in Ephesus demonstrates (Act 18:11; 19:10). We must remember that the metaphor that Paul uses is totally dependent upon God's work and not his. God, alone, grants the growth and our Lord Jesus is the foundation (1 Cor. 3:7, 11).

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Paul, though sound in his modus operandi, again uses his "favorite" prophet for Biblical support to his building metaphor. He uses *Isaiah 52:15!*

Therefore, Paul is being sent to fulfill this prophecy regarding those who have not yet heard the Good News. And, by the way, this is Paul's last use of the prophet Isaiah and his final citation from the OT, after more than fifty occurrences!

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Past

Hindrances

²²Therefore also I have repeatedly been hindered many times from coming to you.

Lastly, Paul clarifies the cause of the hindrance that he left rather ambiguous in Romans 1:13: *“Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.”* What was the hindrance?

Many commentators suggest that it was Satan; yet, such an interpretation is not supported by what Paul has just written. Rather, it was because of the mission that our Lord Jesus gave him—he was too busy planting churches in places where no one has ever preached the Good News of Christ Jesus! Paul’s previous mission work in the East has prevented him from fulfilling his yearning goal of visiting to Rome. However, next week, we will study in v.23, *“but now”* (νυνὶ δέ) heralds an opening for Paul to visit Rome!

Next
Sunday



Romans
15:23-33



Paul's Travel Plan
And
His Intention to Seek Support

PEACE
IN CHRIST
JESUS

