




Sunday School Lesson
Rom. 15:14-21
 by Lorin L. Cranford
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Missionary Preaching



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In this final study under the theme “The Church on Mission” in the Smyth-Helwys Formations series, we return to Paul’s letter to the church at Rome. The passage treats Paul’s confidence in the Christian community at Rome to help him realize his vision of preaching the gospel in the western part of the Mediterranean world.

I. Context

From previous studies in Romans we will use the relevant background materials.

a. Historical

The compositional history (**external history**) of Romans is one of the easier ones in the New Testament. The letter was dictated to a Tertius, who did the actual writing of the letter as Rom. 16:17 indicates: “I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord” (NRSV). The use of a writing secretary, an amanuensis, for the composition of more formal documents was commonplace in the ancient world, and most likely, all of Paul’s letters were written this way. He is mentioned only here in the New Testament. Thus we know virtually nothing about him beyond this one point.

The document was written while Paul was in Corinth (Acts 20:2b-3a) toward the end of the third missionary journey (see Acts 18:23-21:16) and was planning to come to Rome after returning back to Jerusalem and Antioch, as he indicates in chapter fifteen of this letter (NRSV):

“22 This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you 24 when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; 26 for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. 28 So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; 29 and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

30 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. 33 The God of peace be with all of you. Amen.”

Paul had been collecting a massive offering from the Gentile Christians that he was taking back to Jerusalem to help relieve the Jewish Christians who were suffering from famine and persecution at that time. 2 Corinthians 8-9 has an extensive discussion of this relief offering, as well as 1 Cor. 16:1-4. His hope was that this would help build bridges of understanding and fellowship between Jew and Gentile inside the Christian communities of faith. This was still a period of tension, and all over the Mediterranean world



Jewish fanatical nationalistic pride was exploding against non-Jews, especially in Palestine itself. The [Zealot revolt against Rome](#) was foaming in the northern Palestinian province of Galilee, and would engulf the entire eastern Mediterranean world by [the middle 60s](#). Christian communities, which had increasingly become mixtures of Jews and Gentiles, were feeling the brunt of this tension, especially those in Palestine.

In reality, this trip to Jerusalem was risky and would forever alter Paul's life and plans. His intent, while writing to the Roman Christians from Corinth, was to visit them and solicit their support as a base of operations for evangelizing the western Mediterranean world, much as Antioch had been in the efforts in the eastern Mediterranean world through the three missionary journeys described in Acts. So far as we know, Paul was never able to realize this plan. Once in Jerusalem he was arrested and would spend the next several years as a prisoner of the Roman government, first in Caesarea ([Acts 24:1-26:32](#)) and then in Rome itself ([Acts 28:16-31](#)). Whether or not Paul ever traveled in the western Mediterranean is uncertain. Some ancient church traditions suggest that he did, but this cannot be confirmed by solid information. Very likely he managed to gain his freedom after an appearance before the Roman emperor in the early 60s, then resume ministry largely confined to the central Mediterranean Sea area when 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus were written. By the middle 60s he was arrested again and suffered martyrdom at the hands of Nero in Rome.

The **internal history** in our passage is very minimal, but in the larger setting of 15:7-33 it plays a very important role. The above described plans to come to Rome after delivering the relief offering to the believers in Jerusalem and then revisiting the church at Antioch is described in detail in these verses.

b. Literary

In terms of the **literary genre** for 15:14-21, these verses fall into the category of narrative autobiography. Paul is relating his calling to preach to both Jews and especially Gentiles, and thus the basis for

speaking “boldly” to Christians that did not know him personally, for the most part. To be sure, he does not narrate historical details of his calling as is done in places like Gal. 1:11-17, and certainly not like Luke does in Acts 9:1-19a (also 22:6-16 and 26:12-18). In 15:14-21 his depiction is more generalized and the key points become foundations for relating to what he has done in writing the entire letter.

The **literary context** of 15:14-21 is important for correct interpretation. This passage is sometimes linked to vv. 22-33 and then labeled “Travel Plans” (i.e., James D. G. Dunn, “Romans 9-16,” vol 38b in the *Word Biblical Commentary*). In the Pauline letters, the so-called “Travel Plans” typically signal the end of the body proper of the letter and set the stage for the final section, the Conclusio. Clearly vv. 22-33 fall into this category. Verses 14-21 basically set the stage for vv. 22-33, at minimal. But also vv. 7-13 help lay the foundation for what Paul says in vv. 14-21. Thus our passage is a part of a thought flow the ends up the body section of the letter and prepares for the extra long Conclusio in 16:1-27.

Some quick scanning of these surrounding passages will be helpful to the understanding of our text. In [vv. 7-13](#) we find the following material:

7 Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; 10 and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; 11 and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; 12 and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope."

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul appeals to both the Jewish and the Gentile Christians in Rome to receive one another in respect and acceptance. The Christian faith makes no racial distinction between Jews and non-Jews was Paul's point. Christ set this standard and it grows out of Old Testament principle. The section closes with a doxological oriented prayer by Paul for the Roman Christians to embrace this concept of acceptance of one another as a prerequisite for the blessing of God's Holy Spirit. This throws a lot of light on why Paul says what he does in vv. 14-21. In vv. 7-13 he touches on a sensitive issue for first century Christians. This explains some of the tone of his words in our passage.

In [vv. 22-33](#) we find the following material:

22 This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you 24 when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; 26 for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. 28 So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; 29 and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

30 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. 33 The God of peace be with all of you. Amen.

In this passage following ours, we can easily see how it builds on the foundation laid in vv. 14-21. Here Paul lays out his vision for a ministry in the western Mediterranean, with Rome as the home base much as Antioch had been for his ministry in the eastern Mediterranean. The beginning “this is the reason” goes back to his statement in vv. 18-21, which emphasizes his ministry in the eastern Mediterranean world. Verses 22-33 ends with an urgent prayer request as Paul anticipates potential trouble ahead in Jerusalem. This prayer request certainly had a good reason, as Luke confirms in his description of the life-threatening experiences that Paul underwent in Jerusalem (see [Acts 21:15-23:22](#)).

II. Message

The internal structure of vv. 14-21 breaks down into two main sections: vv. 14-16 and vv. 17-21. For

details on how this is developed see the [Block Diagram](#), the [Semantic Diagram](#) and the [Exegetical Outline](#) of these verses in the larger internet version of this study. The first section relates more to the contents of the letter to the Roman Christians, while the second section focuses upon God's blessing of his ministry in general, up to the time of the writing of this letter.

a. Bold Instruction, vv. 14-16

GNT	NASB	NRSV	NLT
<p>15·14 Πέπεισμαι δέ, ἀδελφοί μου, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ περὶ ὑμῶν ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ μεστοὶ ἐστε ἀγαθωσύνης, πεπληρωμένοι πάσης τῆς γνώσεως, δυνάμενοι καὶ ἀλλήλους νουθετεῖν. 15·15 τολμηρότερον δὲ ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἀπὸ μέρους ὡς ἐπαναμνησκῶν ὑμᾶς διὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ 15·16 εἰς τὸ εἶναί με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἰς τὰ ἔθνη, ἱερουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα γένηται ἡ προσφορὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἡγιασμένη ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.</p>	<p>14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. 15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p>14 I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. 15 Nevertheless on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p>14 I am fully convinced, dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well that you are able to teach others all about them. 15 Even so, I have been bold enough to emphasize some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder from me. For I am, by God's grace, 16 a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News and offer you up as a fragrant sacrifice to God so that you might be pure and pleasing to him by the Holy Spirit.</p>

Notes:

The “concerning you” (περὶ ὑμῶν) signals a shift in focus from the [preceding passage](#), vv. 7-13, where he admonished the Roman Christians to overcome racial prejudices between Jew and Gentile through their Christian commitment: “[Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you...](#)” He concluded that rather delicate topic with a doxological prayer in v. 13: “[May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.](#)” Against this backdrop now he expresses confidence in the Roman Christians about their ability to help one another (v. 14): “[...that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.](#)” The two assertions cover the two central points made in vv. 7-13. In that day, Jews and non-Jews instructing one another represented a sensitive situation. Romans felt themselves to be far superior everyone else, especially to Jews, and Jews were convinced they were vastly superior to any one else in the world. Only in a genuine Christian commitment could there be enough humility to seek to learn from one another. And only in that commitment could there be the necessary atmosphere to teach one another without being offensive and elitist. Paul expressed confidence that this would be possible.

Whether or not this would prove to be the actual case is not certain. Barely six years later he would write of the Roman Christians (assuming Philippians was written in Rome) in [Phil. 1:12-18](#):

“12 I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. 15 Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. 16 These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; 17 the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. 18 What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false

motives or true; and in that I rejoice.”

Some in Rome came to so despise Paul that they preached the gospel hoping to deepen Paul’s troubles in imprisonment, most likely hoping that he would be executed by the Roman authorities (cf. v. 17). Thus Paul’s confidence in the Romans in v. 14 was either ill founded or at best applied only to a majority of the believers.

In verse 15a, Paul alludes to what he has said in the body of the letter up to this point: “But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again....” He characterizes his statements as “boldly” (τολμηρότερον). This single use of the comparative adjective in the New Testament is derived from the Greek verb *τολμάω* (*tolmao*) meaning “I dare, am courageous” etc., like where Joseph of Arimathea got up the courage (*τολμάω*) to go in before Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus in order to bury it (Mk. 15:43). In other words Paul cautiously reminds his readers that he made some strong demands upon an initial readership that he did not know personally. One could speculate about which passages Paul had in mind specifically, but no one knows for sure except Paul. The point is that he did not try to inform them of new ideas, but rather to remind them very strongly about some important issues in the Christian faith.

What basis did Paul have for doing this? Vv. 15b-16 provide the answer: “because of the grace given me

by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” The reason Paul spoke boldly to the Romans was his calling by God and the objective of that calling. God’s grace came to Paul, not just for his personal benefit, but as a calling to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles (διὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ 15·16 εἰς τὸ εἶναί με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἰς τὰ ἔθνη.). The expression translated as “minister” is *λειτουργὸν* (*leitourgon*). In religious settings it normally refers to a priest administering sacrifices before deity. In Heb. 8:2, this noun refers to Christ as a priest before God in the Heavenly Tabernacle offering himself up as a sacrifice. The larger context of vv. 15-16 make it clear that this is how Paul perceived his calling to the Gentiles. They are seen as an offering to be lifted up to God as an acceptable sacrifice. This priestly service comes out of Paul’s service to Christ Jesus and is fulfilled in his preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. The Gentiles become an acceptable offering only by being made holy (sanctified; ἡγιασμένη) through the power and work of the Holy Spirit before they are lifted up to God as an offering. Thus in light of the divine calling, Paul felt the need to speak boldly to the Roman Christians about some issues



they needed to be reminded of.

What can we learn from these verses? Several things, I suspect. For one thing, the importance of Christians learning to work productively with one another in the midst of substantial differences in background, culture etc. To have been at the Baptist World Alliance meeting this past week would have enabled us to see just how important that is. Baptists from



2005 BWA Opening Session in England

over 200 countries around the world gathered in Birmingham England to celebrate our unity in Christ in the midst of enormous diversity in language, culture etc. Interestingly, almost 2/3 of Baptists now are in the so-called developing countries of our planet, not in the industrialized west. The opening parade of representatives processing in under the flag of their country is one of the grandest sessions of the meeting held every five years. We were represented by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship; not by the Southern Baptist Convention, which pulled out of the organization last year in a nonsensical action. We can learn much from one another. The SBC pulled out of BWA because it couldn't control everyone else with a mindset that put itself and its views above everyone else. That mentality is contradicted directly by Paul's statement here. Elitism has no legitimate place in Christianity.

Also these verses remind us of a basic principle of Christianity: God's grace granted to us is to benefit others as much as ourselves. Paul saw himself not as a bucket for God's grace but as a channel of that grace. More than anything God's loving action of salvation was to be shared with others in ministry. That still holds true for us as much as it did for Paul. We are the Jordan River, not the Dead Sea.

Our ministry can be characterized as a priestly ministry. Each of us is a priest in God's heavenly temple. Our reaching out to others is solely for the purpose of helping them become an acceptable offering before Almighty God. That acceptability cannot be accomplished by our efforts, however. They can become holy before God only when the Holy Spirit washes them in the blood of Christ Jesus and purifies them to be presented to God.

b. Divine Commission, vv. 17-21

GNT

15·17 ἔχω οὖν τὴν καύχησιν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν·
15·18 οὐ γὰρ τολμήσω τι λαλεῖν ὧν οὐ κατειργάσατο Χριστός δι' ἐμοῦ εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἐθνῶν, λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ,
15·19 ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων, ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος θεοῦ ὥστε με ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πεπληρωκέναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 15·20 οὕτως δὲ φιλοτιμούμενον εὐαγγελίζεσθαι οὐχ ὅπου ἄνομάσθη Χριστός, ἵνα μὴ ἐπ' ἀλλότριον θεμέλιον οἰκοδομῶ,
15·21 ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται, *Οἷς οὐκ ἀνηγγέλη περι αὐτοῦ ὄψονται, καὶ οἱ οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν συνήσουσιν.*

NASB

17 Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.
18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 20 And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; 21 but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."

NRSV

17 In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God.
18 For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, 19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ. 20 Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, 21 but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand."

NLT

17 So it is right for me to be enthusiastic about all Christ Jesus has done through me in my service to God. 18 I dare not boast of anything else. I have brought the Gentiles to God by my message and by the way I lived before them. 19 I have won them over by the miracles done through me as signs from God – all by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ all the way from Jerusalem clear over into Illyricum. 20 My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else. 21 I have been following the plan spoken of in the Scriptures, where it says, "Those who have never been told about him will see, and those who have never heard of him will understand."

Notes:

In this second section Paul broadens his discussion to talk about the larger contours of his ministry to

the Gentiles. The “then” (NRSV, οὐν) links these verses to the preceding ones as an implication present in vv. 14-16 that Paul now wants to make clear to his readers. This becomes the larger foundation upon which Paul’s words to the Romans rests, as diagrammed below.

Paul begins with an important declaration of pride or boasting. The Greek word καύχησιν (kauchesin) is one of those difficult words to translate accurately into English. With the three translations that we use representing three different approaches to doing Bible translation, we find two basically different ways: “boasting” (NASB); “to boast” (NRSV); and “to be enthusiastic about” (NLT). Given the context, I suspect the NLT comes the closest to capturing not only the meaning but also the spirit of Paul’s statement. The word in an usage like this connotes the idea of “taking pride in” something.



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What did Paul take pride in? Two qualifications of this word are found. (1) His καύχησιν came through his union with Christ Jesus “in Christ Jesus.” It wasn’t something that Paul accomplished through his own efforts and determination. His spiritual union with Christ was the context for his pride. (2) His pride was connected to the “things done for God” (τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν). Although the English translations mask this, the language used by Paul continues the temple sacrifice imagery. Those individuals offered up to God through preaching the gospel were the things that Paul took pride in. Here it is important to note that Paul does not call attention to “works of righteousness” nor “good deeds” growing out of obedient faith. Thus, the NRSV translation is misleading in its expression “I have reason to boast of my work for God.” That’s not what Paul is talking about here. Paul’s experience of God’s grace on the Damascus Road led him to disavow forever any boasting about “what he had done for God.” That smacked too much of his old days as a Pharisee. Anyone who helps another person come to God in profound conversion knows what Paul is talking about here. No more satisfying feeling exists than to see God at work in another’s life and to know that God used you to bring that about.

What was the basis for his ministry of gospel preaching? Verses 18-21 provide the basis for Paul’s pride in gospel preaching. The conjunction “for” (γάρ) in verse 18 signals this. A twofold foundation is set forth (see the [semantic diagram](#) and [exegetical outline](#) for more details).

First (vv. 18-20), “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.” The heart of Paul’s gospel preaching grows out of his experience of Christ. The Greek verb here (οὐ τολμήσω τι λαλεῖν) is actually a little stronger than the NRSV above expresses. It’s more the tone of “I dare not speak anything...” The limits of Paul’s preaching were defined by Christ alone; not by cutesy rhetoric, not by imaginative thinking, etc. What Christ had accomplished through Paul (ὃν οὐ κατειργάσατο Χριστὸς δι’ ἐμοῦ) served as foundational to Paul’s preaching.

This core expression then serves as the basis for a number of modifiers that define more precisely what Paul means. First, the purpose of this accomplishment by Christ is expressed as “to win obedience from the Gentiles” (εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἐθνῶν). Paul’s calling was mainly to the non-Jewish world of his day. The danger and radicalism of such a calling cannot be over emphasized. In a Jewish world, where the thinking was that God only cared for his covenant people Israel, to focus on non Jews meant going against centuries old, deeply rooted religious tradition. In reality, the living out of this conviction meant deep problems and risks for Paul. Jewish Christians were very uneasy with him. Non-Christian Jews hated him with a passion. To make matters worse, this calling was lived out during a time of growing tensions of Jews with Gentiles, that led to the first Jewish war not a decade after Paul wrote these words to the Romans. Not even the few white Baptist pastors who preached against racial segregation in the 1950s and 1960s in the South faced opposition matching that which Paul experienced.

This obedience of the Gentiles was to take place in two areas: word and deed (λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ). This phrase modifies “the obedience of Gentiles.” (See [block diagram](#) for details.) Mere profession of faith is useless if not backed up in deeds of obedience. Here Paul echoes what James said in Jas. 2:14-26 in the faith and works pericope. Faith without works is dead was the point of both James and Paul.

Secondly, the accomplishments of Christ took the context of “the power of signs and wonders” (ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων). The role of miracles in Paul’s ministry is attributed to Christ at work in Paul; not to Paul’s special anointing or anything else. In the context here, it could appear that miracles played a major role in Paul’s preaching of the gospel. But a careful survey of Luke’s depiction of Paul’s ministry over a

thirty year period contains the mentioning of only [six miracles](#). To be sure, [Acts 19:11](#) indicates that more than this number was done by Paul. Yet, Luke does not give the impression that performing miracles played a major role in Paul's ministry. Certainly not to the extent that modern "faith healers" practice.

The ultimate point of Paul here is that God confirmed his ministry in clear fashion by the expression of divine power on that preaching of the gospel. So much so that most people could sense that Christ was at work in the apostle's ministry. Not all people, however, could tell this. Paul faced substantial opposition from both inside the communities of faith and from outside them in virtually every place that he traveled. He recognized this in his request for prayer for safety in 15:30-32 right after our passage.

The third qualifier of the accomplishments of Christ through Paul is "by the power of the Spirit of God" (ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος θεοῦ). Closely related to the preceding modifier, the power of the Holy Spirit in Paul's ministry was critical. This was the difference between genuineness of ministry, and fakery. The so-called "god-men" (θεοσανῆρ) of Paul's day traveled the country side performing "miracles" and made a good living off convincing people that they possessed supernatural powers. To the contrary, Paul desired greatly that his work clearly demonstrate the presence of God through His Spirit. The role of miracles was to validate the contents of his preaching in order to help them turn to Christ in faith. The role of the Holy Spirit in salvation is foundational in Paul's teaching.

What was the intended result of Paul's being careful to preach only the words of Christ? Verses 19b-20

set this forth: "so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ. 20 Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation" (ὥστε με ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πεπληρωκέναί τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 15:20 οὕτως δὲ φιλοτιμούμενον εὐαγγελίζεσθαι οὐχ ὅπου ἄνωμάσθη Χριστός, ἵνα μὴ ἐπ' ἀλλότριον θεμέλιον οἰκοδομῶ.). The Greek conjunction ὥστε (hoste; "so that") sets forth the assumed impact of Paul's preaching of the gospel. Jerusalem to Illyricum describes the eastern Mediterranean world with broad strokes. Paul makes the surprising statement "so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ" (ὥστε με ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πεπληρωκέναί τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ.). Careful reading of Acts 13-28 makes it clear the Paul had not covered every city, much less towns and villages, of the territory described here. One can only take Paul's words in the broad, generalized sense of their meaning. What is clear, is that when he established a community of faith, such as at Ephesus, he expected that community of faith to spread to the surrounding regions like the ripples of a rock thrown in a pond of water. Also, implied in verse 20 is that other apostles were beginning to move into the eastern Mediterranean world to lengthen their ministries. This is also implied in [1 Cor 9:5](#) written a few years earlier from Ephesus to the Corinthians: "Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?" Tradition suggests that the apostle John spent the last years of his life at Ephesus, and that Peter traveled in the Roman provinces of what is now central and northern Turkey before coming to Rome. His first letter, written in the early 60s, [1 Peter](#) (1:1), is directed largely to Christians in that region: "To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..."



Paul's preaching of the gospel. Jerusalem to Illyricum describes the eastern Mediterranean world with broad strokes. Paul makes the surprising statement "so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ" (ὥστε με ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πεπληρωκέναί τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ.). Careful reading of Acts 13-28 makes it clear the Paul had not covered every city, much less towns and villages, of the territory described here. One can only take Paul's words in the broad, generalized sense of their meaning. What is clear, is that when he established a community of faith, such as at Ephesus, he expected that community of faith to spread to the surrounding regions like the ripples of a rock thrown in a pond of water. Also, implied in verse 20 is that other apostles were beginning to move into the eastern Mediterranean world to lengthen their ministries. This is also implied in [1 Cor 9:5](#) written a few years earlier from Ephesus to the Corinthians: "Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?" Tradition suggests that the apostle John spent the last years of his life at Ephesus, and that Peter traveled in the Roman provinces of what is now central and northern Turkey before coming to Rome. His first letter, written in the early 60s, [1 Peter](#) (1:1), is directed largely to Christians in that region: "To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..."

Thus Paul had interpreted God's calling to focus on those places where no one else had previously preached the gospel: "Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been

named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation" (οὕτως δὲ φιλοτιμούμενον εὐαγγελίζεσθαι οὐχ ὅπου ὠνομάσθη Χριστός, ἵνα μὴ ἐπ' ἀλλότριον θεμέλιον οἰκοδομῶ). This is not intended to set forth a universal principle for all Christians of all times. But it does indicate a concern that everyone have opportunity to hear the message of Christ. In modern times it suggests strongly that various mission agencies should cooperate together to not duplicate one another's efforts. Traditionally this has been the practice, especially with Southern Baptists working with other groups. That is, until recent times, when this practice has been largely abandoned. In contrast the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has sought from the beginning to focus on those parts of the world where there is little or no gospel witness. To be certain, this is a much harder way to do missions. Most of the "easy" parts of the world have been saturated with missionary efforts. The areas where little gospel witness exists are the "harder" regions where one does not see immediate results in the large numbers like in the "easy" regions.

For Paul this calling to the western Mediterranean world rested on scriptural foundations. In verse 21 he quotes Isa. 52:15 as the basis of his desire to not go where others have gone: "Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand." (*Οἷς οὐκ ἀνηγγέλη περι αὐτοῦ ὄψονται, καὶ οἱ οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν συνήσουσιν.*). To be sure, Paul makes an interesting application of this OT prophesy regarding God's Suffering Servant found in [52:13-15](#): "13 See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. 14 Just as there were many who were astonished at him — so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals — 15 so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for *that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.*" But the cited principle holds basically true to the use that Paul made of it. The work of God's Servant will become widely known. Paul saw his ministry as contributing to the spreading of the good news about him.

The message of Rom. 15:14-21 is a powerful one. Paul saw his preaching of the gospel to Gentiles as his calling from God. That calling led him to appeal to the Roman Christians to break down barriers of hostility between Jews and non-Jews (vv. 7-13). This calling was the basis of his anticipated trip to Rome as a launch pad for preaching the gospel in the western Mediterranean (vv. 22-33). As history unfolded Paul did not realize this goal -- so far as we can determine --, although he did make it to Rome as a prisoner of the Roman government. It would lay in the hands of other Christian missionaries to spread the gospel in those regions. But within a couple of centuries Christianity had become a major influence in the western Mediterranean. One never knows for certain how God is going to lead us through life. But one can be certain that God will lead us, and in obedience to His calling that leadership will provide maximum opportunity to influence others to come to Christ in transforming commitment.

The lingering question then becomes "How obedient to God's calling are we?"

GNT

15·14 Πέπεισμαι δέ, ἀδελφοί μου, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ περὶ ὑμῶν ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ μεστοὶ ἐστε ἀγαθωσύνης, πεπληρωμένοι πάσης τῆς γνώσεως, δυνάμενοι καὶ ἀλλήλους νουθετεῖν. 15·15 τολμηρότερον δὲ ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἀπὸ μέρους ὡς ἐπαναμιμνήσκων ὑμᾶς διὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ 15·16 εἰς τὸ εἶναί με λειτουργὸν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἰς τὰ ἔθνη, ἱεουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα γένηται ἡ προσφορὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἡγιασμένη ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. 15·17 ἔχω οὖν τὴν καύχησιν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν· 15·18 οὐ γὰρ τολμήσω τι λαλεῖν ἧν οὐ κατειργάσατο Χριστὸς δι' ἐμοῦ εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἐθνῶν, λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ, 15·19 ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων, ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος θεοῦ· ὥστε με ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πεπληρωκέναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 15·20 οὕτως δὲ φιλοτιμούμενον εὐαγγελίζεσθαι οὐχ ὅπου ὠνομάσθη Χριστὸς, ἵνα μὴ ἐπ' ἀλλότριον θεμέλιον οἰκοδομῶ, 15·21 ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται,

*Οἷς οὐκ ἀνηγγέλη περὶ αὐτοῦ ὄψονται,
καὶ οἷ οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν συνήσουσιν.*

NASB

14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. 15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

17 Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. 18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 20 And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; 21 but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."

NRSV

14 I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. 15 Nevertheless on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

17 In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God. 18 For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, 19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ. 20 Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, 21 but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand."

NLT

14 I am fully convinced, dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well that you are able to teach others all about them. 15 Even so, I have been bold enough to emphasize some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder from me. For I am, by God's grace, 16 a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News and offer you up as a fragrant sacrifice to God so that you might be pure and pleasing to him by the Holy Spirit.

17 So it is right for me to be enthusiastic about all Christ Jesus has done through me in my service to God. 18 I dare not boast of anything else. I have brought the Gentiles to God by my message and by the way I lived before them. 19 I have won them over by the miracles done through me as signs from God – all by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ all the way from Jerusalem clear over into Illyricum. 20 My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else. 21 I have been following the plan spoken of in the Scriptures, where it says, "Those who have never been told about him will see, and those who have never heard of him will understand."



GNT Diagram

- 15·14 δὲ
- 1 **Πέπεισμαι...αὐτὸς ἐγὼ**
 ἀδελφοί μου,
 καὶ
 περὶ ὑμῶν
- καὶ
 ὅτι...αὐτοὶ μεστοὶ ἐστε
 ἀγαθωσύνης,
 πεπληρωμένοι
 | πάσης τῆς γνώσεως
 |-----|
 |
 δυνάμενοι...ἀλλήλους καὶ
 νουθετεῖν.
- 15·15 δὲ
 2 **τολμηρότερον**
ἔγραψα ὑμῖν
 ἀπὸ μέρους
 ὡς ἐπαναμιμνήσκων ὑμᾶς
 διὰ τὴν χάριν
 τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι
 ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ
 εἰς τὸ εἶναί με λειτουργὸν
 Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
 εἰς τὰ ἔθνη,
 ἱεουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον
 τοῦ θεοῦ,
 /-----|
 ἵνα γένηται ἡ προσφορὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν ὑπρόσδεκτος,
 ἡγιασμένη
 ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.
- 15·16 οὖν
- 3 **ἔχω τὴν καύχησιν**
 ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
 τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν·
- 15·18 γὰρ
- 4 **οὐ τολμήσω τι λαλεῖν**
 ὧν οὐ κατειργάσατο Χριστὸς
 δι' ἐμοῦ
 εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἐθνῶν,
 λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ,
 ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων,
 ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἰεροῦ·
- 15·19 ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ
 καὶ
 κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ
 ὥστε με...πεπληρωκέναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

15:20

δὲ
οὕτως
φιλοτιμούμενον εὐαγγελίζεσθαι
οὐχ ὅπου ὠνομάσθη Χριστός,
ἐπ' ἀλλότριον θεμέλιον
ἵνα μὴ...οἰκοδομῶ,

15:21

5

ἀλλὰ
(ἔστω)
καθὼς γέγραπται,

Οἷς οὐκ ἀνηγγέλη
περὶ αὐτοῦ

α

ὄψονται,

β

καὶ
οἱ οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν

συνήσουσιν.

Semantic Diagram

15:14	A.	δε	1	Perf	Pass	Ind	1 S	ἐγὼ
I.	-15:15-	δε	2	1 Aor	Act	Ind	1 S	(ἐγὼ)
	B.	οὖν	3	Pres	Act	Ind	1 S	(ἐγὼ)
15:17	A.	γὰρ	4	1 Aor	Act	Subj	1 S	(ἐγὼ)
II.	-15:18-	ἀλλὰ	5	Pres	---	Imp	3 S	OT quote
	1.							
15:21	B.							
	2.							

Exegetical Outline

- I. (1-2) Paul spoke boldly to mature Christians at Rome on the basis of his calling
 - A. (1) Paul expressed his confidence in the spiritual maturity of the Roman Christians
 - B. (2) His calling to the Gentiles led him to speak boldly to them
- II. (3-5) His ministry therefore prospered through faithfulness to God's calling
 - A. (3) He could take pride in God's blessing of his ministry from Jerusalem to Illyricum
 - B. (4-5) The reason for this lay in his ministry to preach where others had not gone.
 - 1. (4) His preaching was based upon the gospel proclaimed in new territory
 - 2. (5) His calling grew out of divine principle set forth in Isa. 52:15