

Accept and Admonish One Another

Romans 15: 7-21
Dr. David Harrell
February 3, 2013

Will you join me by taking your Bibles and turning to Paul's epistle to the Romans. We come again to our study in verse 7 of chapter 15. We will be looking at verses 7-21. I have entitled my discourse to you this morning "Accept and admonish one another", and the reason for that title will become abundantly clear as we look at the text this morning. Let me read it to you, Romans 15 beginning with verse 7:

Wherefore accept one another just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "Therefore I will give praise to thee among the Gentiles, and I will sing to thy name. Again he says, "rejoice oh Gentiles with His people and again praise the Lord all you Gentiles and let all the peoples praise Him." Again Isaiah says, "There shall come the route of Jesse, and he who arises to rule over the Gentiles, in Him, shall the Gentiles hope. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. And concerning you my brother, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. But I have written very boldly to you on some point so as to remind you again because of the grace that was given me from God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God that my offering of the gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in the things pertaining to God. 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 and the power of signs and wonders, and the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ and thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation but as it is written, they who had no news of Him shall see and they who have not heard shall understand.

Paul has devoted all of chapter 14 and the first 21 verses of chapter 15 to the issue of the unity of the church, unity in the church. Obviously, this was a big issue, an important issue, as well it should be. We read about this in other places in the New Testament as well. Unfortunately, church unity is like good health and physical conditioning, everybody wants it but few do what is necessary to achieve it.

Let me remind you of the context here again. Paul was not the founder of the church at Rome, nor had he ever even visited them. Although according to chapter 16 we see that he knew a number of them personally. But the aspired apostle knew full well of their Godly reputation, even though there were Jews and Gentiles in there that were fighting amongst each other for various issues that we've talked about in Sunday's past, but he

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knew that they were Godly people that loved the Lord, but he also knew about the problems of unity. It was a doctrinally sound church, as we will see, but it was prone to bickering among one another over nonessentials, over gray areas that neither God commands nor condemns. However some were convinced otherwise, well-meaning folks that love the Lord but simply could not grasp their full liberty in Christ. They remained shackled, therefore, to certain self-imposed religious restrictions and they were prone to criticize and condemn those who disagreed with them. They were primarily in the minority but these people, as you will recall, he called the “weak.”

Then those who understood and enjoyed their freedom in Christ were called the “strong”, they were the majority, but they were also prone to criticize and condemn the weak. And sadly the same kind of in-fighting occurs in many churches and when it does, it brings dishonor to Christ and it undermines the power of the gospel, meaning when the world looks at that, they say "boy so much for your transforming gospel. You people are just fighting amongst yourselves." It certainly distracts us from what is really important and that is the proclamation of the gospel to the lost and living a gospel-centered life.

I have learned over the years to very quickly deal with these things and decisively deal with them when there is bickering over nonessentials in the church because it can just cripple the church. It can distract you from the things that are most important and it certainly betrays how out-of-whack our priorities can get. Unfortunately, misplaced priorities in a church will breed like fruit flies, so you have to deal with it. That’s what the apostle Paul is doing here.

Now in our text this morning, I wish to emphasize three great truths pertaining to Christian unity that I hope you will never forget. We need to:

1. Accept one another
2. Admonish one another
3. Remember what you know.

This is a very instructive passage and I pray that each of you will learn and apply it to your life, and fathers I pray that you will teach these things to your children as you should everything that you learn from the word of God.

Now, you will recall in verses 5 and 6 we are told basically to rejoice in unity. Paul interrupts his call for unity between the weak and the strong and he prays in verse 5:

"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus. That with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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Then beginning with our text this morning beginning in verse 7, he is going to summarize that statement with a very positive command and here it is:

"Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God".
So this is the first truth that we must grab hold of in our lives. Accept one another.

Notice this is the same admonition he gave to the strong in chapter 14 verse 1, but now he gives it to the weak as well. He uses the same word accept in both verses 1 and verse 3 to define how believers who may differ with each other on some things on nonessentials need to treat each other. The term "accept" as we have studied before comes from a Greek word that means to receive or welcome a person as a desired guest. We would treat that person with joy and compassion and without any reservation. It literally carries the idea of welcoming a person into the realm of your friendship, into the realm of your fellowship. It is the same word used to plead with Philemon when Paul pleads with him to graciously take back his runaway slave Onesimus. Too, he says in Philemon 17:

"Accept him as you would me."

So that gives you the idea of the term. This certainly begins with the whole idea of just getting to know a person with whom you may differ on some nonessential, especially somebody that perhaps you've harbored some bitterness towards. Getting to know them beyond kind of the bump and run, grip and grin type of thing that you do before or after church.

"But pastor, the guy is so off base with those weird hang-ups he has about things that you can and can't do on Sundays, I just don't think I can do that!" Oh really? Well, you will recall that Apollos was also off base on some things, in Acts 18:26, when "he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue." Do you remember Priscilla and Aquila "took him aside" (proslombono), it's the same Greek word. They "took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately", that's the idea.

"But pastor I just can't accept him! He drinks wine with his meals and his wife wears slacks to church and she uses birth-control rather than trusting God and she sends her kids to public schools." You get the idea? All these things that we come up with. I would ask you where do you see the word "unless" after "accept one another"?

"Well pastor I can't because she waves her hands during the worship service just trying to attract attention to herself." "Pastor I can't accept them because he doesn't use the King James!" "I can't because she thinks amplified guitars are of the devil." My friend, this kind of foolishness is what's of the devil. We are to accept one another. What must the world think when they see that kind of stuff? This is a call to self-sacrificing love.

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I want you to think about it, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, set aside His glorious attributes and all of the splendors of heaven to come to this earth to seek and to save the lost and He loved you, and He loved me while we were yet sinners He even died for us, in our state of rebellion. In our state of maniacal love for self, He dies for us. Yet, we can't accept others unless they agree with us? Especially over things that God neither commands nor condemns? As I was meditating on this I thought of what Jesus said, "Come unto Me." And in Matthew 11:29, He said to sinners, "take my yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart."

You know, many times we say to other saints just the opposite. "Stay away from me unless you wear my yoke and learn from me for I am controlling and proud at heart." Dear child of God, we are blood bought saints, united to Christ. We are members of His body, the church, the most sacred assembly on earth. We shouldn't be like toddlers in a Sunday school class. Thankfully, for the most part, we are not here at this church, even though there are times where we all are prone to act this way. "Accept one another just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." Do you realize how arrogant it is to reject others who God accepts? When He accepts you with all of your sin? I mean think about it that. That is really out of whack. Do you realize that when we accept one another we are accepting Christ Himself? Now think about that. Jesus said in Matthew 10:40:

" He who receives you, receives me and he who receives Me receives him who sent Me."

Beloved, remember that our motive for accepting those with whom we differ on *nonessentials* is the glory of God. Christ accepts us though we differ with Him on the *essentials*. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. How many of us do that like we should? None of us! And yet we are still accepted. Why does He do this? He does it for the glory of God; to demonstrate His transforming grace in our lives. So when we love without partiality and accept one another without condemnation and condescension we put the glory of God on display, we put the transforming power of the gospel on display so that others can see how we love one another and they can say, "wow there is something about those people." The Holy Spirit uses that testimony to soften hearts so that others can believe, repent, and be saved.

So we are commanded to pursue fellowship with those with whom we may differ on some discretionary matter of personal conviction. Not condemn them, not ignore them. Let me make it real clear, if there is somebody in this church that you have harbored bitterness against because they don't agree with you on some nonessential, what are you supposed to do? Accept them. That is a whole lot more than just, you know, shaking there hand before Sunday. It's the idea of welcoming them in to the realm of your friendship and fellowship however the Lord may cause that to happen and you need to pray to that end. That's how unity is developed and protected in the church.

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I talked with a man, it's been a couple of years ago, he said he grew up in a church and he absolutely hated it. He was a nonbeliever. He said I want nothing to do with a church. He said no offense to you but he said I have had it with churches. I remember one of the things he said; all the people do in the church is fight amongst each other. He told the story of how his dad came home from a deacon meeting with a broken nose and a black eye. He said, "You know what they were fighting about"? I was thinking, well obviously I don't but I can imagine because I've heard stories like this so many times. "They were fighting over choir robes and an organ. Some wanted the robes, some didn't, others wanted the organ and some didn't." You see the impact that it had on that young man's life. Actually he was older when I was talking with him. Obviously that exposes a lack of shepherding; it's a total rejection of what Paul said in verse 19 of chapter 14:

"Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

But my friends it is also an utter disregard for what Paul is teaching here as well as his admonishment to the Ephesians in Ephesians 4 beginning with verse 32 where we are told to:

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

I think of all of the millions of dollars churches spend on evangelizing the lost in other parts of the world and frankly—and I'm not saying you give up on this—with very little effect. Think how much more effective we would be if we all got serious about accepting one another just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Then Paul continues by giving a series of Old Testament illustrations to show how Christ accepts both the Jew and the Gentile and this would especially speak to the Christian Jews who were in the church who struggle with accepting their Gentile brothers as God has accepted them consistent with His plan of redemption all along. He begins by reminding the Jewish believers about God's faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant promises to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Notice verse 8:

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers."

What a marvelous illustration of God's gracious acceptance of a rebellious people. Not only did Christ become a servant to the Jew, but also verse 9, to the Gentile. He says:

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"For the gentiles to glorify God for His mercy."

Now although God first established His covenant with the Jewish patriarchs and the people of Israel, it was God's intention from the very beginning in His divine decree to extend mercy to the Gentiles as well. So the point here is the Jew's within the church have absolutely no basis for pride or prejudice. This was all part of God's plan. I must digress for a brief moment with an important footnote. We must understand there is spiritual and unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles. Certainly in Galatians 2:14 Paul says that He made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. But we must also understand through scripture that this unity in salvation does not nullify identity and function. Israel does not become the New Testament church as some would argue. Gentiles don't become Jews, Jews don't become Gentiles. In fact as we look at scripture we see that Jewish believers still obtain their ethnic identity and their ordained function. There still exists, for example, a future role for Israel as a nation. The nation Israel will be both saved and restored with a unique identity and function in a future millennial kingdom upon the earth.

Paul's point here is very simple. Believing Jews should rejoice in Christ, who is God's servant who came to confirm the promises that God gave to their forefathers. The Gentiles should rejoice in the undeserved mercy that God has also extended to them through Christ. We as Gentiles are the wild branch that has been grafted into the root of covenantal blessing. Now to collaborate what he has just stated, he offers four Old Testament quotes which represent all three divisions of the Old Testament. A very important concept especially in dealing with Jewish brethren. His first and third are from the book of Psalms, the second is from the law, and the fourth is from the prophets. This is a very compelling and comprehensive body of divine evidence.

First, in the end of verse nine, he quotes from Psalm 18:49. There the Psalmist declares:

"Therefore I will give praise to the nations, O LORD, among the Gentiles and I will sing to Your Name."

Second, in verse 10, he quotes from Deuteronomy 32:43 where the Gentiles are now summoned to join in with Israel in praising God. And again he says:

"Rejoice, O nations, with His people."

Then third in verse 11 he quotes from Psalm 117:1 where the Gentiles are summoned independently to praise God. He says and again:

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles and let all the peoples praise Him."

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I think that would include most all of us here. Then fourth in verse 12 he quotes from Isaiah 11:10 where the prophet speaks to the Gentiles concerning the hope that is theirs because of Christ who will one day rule over them. There he says:

"And again, Isaiah says, there shall come the root of Jesse. By the way Jesse was the father of David through whom the messiah eventually came. "And he who arises to rule over the Gentiles in him shall the Gentiles hope."

So with this irrefutable evidence of God's predetermined plan to use His covenant people the Jews to help save the Gentiles to help bring them to Himself for His glory. There is no justification for any Jew to harbor resentment towards any Gentile and vice versa. So He says, accept one another just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. Having written this, Paul bursts forth into a marvelous benediction that really summarizes the priority of praise over prejudice. He says in verse 13:

"Now may the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Implied in these words, especially in this context is something like this; folks focus on the priority of the gospel not your personal preferences and cultural religious ideas on nonessentials, accept one another.

Then he moves to another essential for Christian unity. #2. Admonish one another. Notice verse 14:

"And concerning you, my brethren, I myself am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another."

Notice the terms that he uses. The term goodness speaks of morality. He's saying here, you roman believers are full of virtue; you're full of moral integrity. This is the fruit of walking in the spirit and walking in the light of divine truth. Also he says you're filled with all knowledge. This speaks of doctrinal discernment. They understood the Word of God. They had an accurate intellectual grasp of the gospel of Christ. Said a little differently, they were a doctrinally sound church. They were being transformed by the renewing of their mind. So think about it, he's saying to these believers in Rome that they were blood-bought, spirit wrought, spirit taught, spirit-empowered saints and as a result they were equipped to do something. What is that? To admonish one another. The term admonish in the original language is *noutheteo*, you've heard of Nouthetic counseling, that's where it comes from. It means to instruct or to warn, even to encourage. It comes from two Greek words. It comes from the word *nous* which is the word for mind or comprehension. Added to that is the word *tithemi* which means to put or to place or to lie

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something. It conveys the idea therefore of putting someone's mind or understanding in the proper path.

So the Roman believers had all they needed to admonish or counsel one another. They were therefore competent to instruct, to warn, to encourage one another toward further godliness. The same can be said of every child of God, every believer who is full of moral goodness, who is doctrinally sound, Spirit-led. All of us are called to admonish one another. Practically speaking, counseling belongs in the church, not in the office of some secular psychologist who has no understanding of sin, who has no understanding of the human heart, who has no understanding of the power of the word of God and the spirit to remedy the issues that man deals with. Biblically, man has two kinds of problems; spiritual problems and physical problems. There is no third category called psychological problems. We do not have personality disorders. We have worship disorders. Our hearts are deceitful, they are desperately wicked.

Even as believers we remain incarcerated in this unredeemed humanness and our flesh can manifest itself in a myriad of ways. Secular psychology can be very helpful in the realm of physical problems. In the realm of things like organic brain disease, head injuries, learning disabilities, all those kinds of things. I would also quickly add that they have done a remarkable job in categorizing various ways sin manifests itself in human behavior. But they just don't understand that the issue is spiritual, it's not psychological. So they can't offer any real help. They can't give any real hope, nor can they effect any lasting change that will ultimately cause a person to live to the glory of God. They are not "full of goodness filled with all knowledge" because they do not have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. So they are not, shall we say, equipped to admonish, to instruct, to warn, to encourage. But the saints are, the saints are. Sadly even much of what passes today for Christian counseling is nothing more than a Christian who prays before he or she counsels using some of the various secular theories of psychology.

Beloved we must remember the authority, the power, the sufficiency of the word of God and the power of the spirit to use His word and to use His people. Remember what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16:

"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable, in other words it can do something here. What can it do? It's profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. Therefore as Christians, we can rely on the authority and the power and the sufficiency of scripture to address any kind of problem that does not have a physical etiology.

2 Peter 1:3 we read:

"His divine power has granted to use everything pertaining to life and Godliness."

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How? Through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Now, as in every Christian ministry some are believers are most gifted, some believers are more trained than others to admonish their brother. But again, we are all called to do this. Hopefully as parents you are admonishing your children. Hopefully husbands and wives if you see your spouse doing something that is dishonoring to the Lord, you will come along and try to instruct and to warn and to encourage them. Those in various capacities of Christian ministry should constantly be admonishing those under their care but sadly, I believe that this is one of the most disregarded commands in all of scripture. Too often we as believers see our brother or our sister in Christ living in some kind of sin, they are destroying themselves, they are destroying their family, their life is in shambles and we say nothing? At least not to them. Oh we'll say something to others like "whoa that dude really needs counseling." "That gal is really messed up." "Man, that guy is a moron." We say all of these types of things but don't obey, for example what Paul said in Galatians 6:1-2:

"Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual; restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness."

It goes on to say, we are to "bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ." To bear the burden here is the burden of sin. This person is weighted down by sin. You are to come alongside and to try to help them before that sin crushes them. That fulfills the law of Christ. What is that? That we love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. This is what love looks like!

So Paul encourages the Romans saints, those who were characterized by moral virtue, who had a sound grasp of the word of God by telling them that they were competent to council. So they should admonish one another. Again, a command that extends to every Christian who walks faithfully by the Spirit. I might add especially in this context that this is absolutely crucial for there to be unity in the church. If this is not happening, everything begins to fall apart.

Notice another interesting truth tucked into the next verse, verse 15. He says:

"But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again."

That phrase is interesting in the original language. It means as putting you in mind. In another words, he was reminding them only of what they doubtless knew already.

This leads me to my third point. Not only are we to accept one another, and admonish one another, but we are to remember what we know. He gives some examples here. He

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talks about how he wrote to them very boldly and again in order to remind them of things they already knew. You will recall that he boldly warned them in chapter 6 of not falling back into the slavery of sin.

In chapter 8 He warned them of the dangers of living according to the flesh and not putting to death the deeds of the flesh. He warned them about the importance of being led by the Spirit. I can jump to chapter 11, he warns them about pride and prejudice on the part of some.

Then in chapter 12 He challenges them to present their bodies a living and a holy sacrifice acceptable to God. He warned them not to be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of their minds. He warned them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think.

Then in chapter 13 he issued warnings about being in subjection to the governing authorities.

In chapter 14, he warned them about how the strong should stop making fun of the weak and the weak should stop condemning the strong. But he did not do these things because these people were clueless about them, because they had never heard of them. But because they needed to be reminded. Remember they were already full of goodness and filled with all knowledge. They had a solid grasp of scripture; they just needed to be reminded. Beloved this is true of all of us. We need to be boldly reminded of the things that we know to be true. Why? Because it is so easy to forget. Because it is so easy to become so familiar with certain truths of the word of God that they become meaningless to us. We just kind of overlook them.

Isaiah indicted Israel for so quickly forgetting God's truth. In Isaiah 17:10 he says:

"For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the rock of your refuge."

Jesus admonished the apostles in John 15:20 to:

“ Remember the word that I said to you.”

I have to laugh, I love Peter. I think I see myself in him. Peter must have known how important this was in his life because he mentions it four times just right at the very beginning. In 2 Peter he speaks of the blessings of our salvation, the essentials of our spiritual life. He says in verse 12 of chapter 1:

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“Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder.”

Underscore that: “stir you up.” It means to arouse someone completely, to thoroughly awaken someone from spiritual lethargy and sleep. He wants us to wake up from our muddleheaded laziness and become spiritual alert. You know, folks, if you’re honest with yourself, your flesh and my flesh is lazy. It’s just lazy. It hears things and it sets certain things aside that we don't want to hear because it might be a little uncomfortable to do that because we have some pet sin that we want to maintain. So we get lulled to sleep by the world, by the flesh, by the temptations around us.

In verse 15 of chapter 1 he went on and he said:

“I will also be diligent that in any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind.”

In chapter 3 verse 1 he says:

"Now beloved the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder."

My friend, I don't care how much truth you know. I don't care how spiritual you are, how mature you are, you need to still be reminded daily of the wonderful truths of the word so that it stays fresh. So that you do not lose your awe of God so that you do not become spiritually lethargic, so that your worship is constantly being stimulated, so that you will walk faithfully with the Lord. That's why the word of God tells us over and over again how important it is to meditate on the word, are you doing that? That's how you are reminded. Certainly in this context these constant reminders are necessary to challenge us in they are of Christian unity, to remind us as I'm doing today to accept one another. That's not something where you're saying, you know, I've never heard of that before? Admonish one another. Really? I didn't think I was supposed to do that. I thought that was supposed to do. I mean some of you may have been ignorant; you're not going to be after today. For most of you, you already knew that, you just need to be reminded.

Paul offers some important words, a reminder to them next as he closes this section. Again not being their spiritual father, he closes this section by reminding them of his divine calling as an apostle on their behalf and by implication underscoring just the supreme importance of heeding what he has written. Notice verse 15:

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"But I have written very boldly to you on some point so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentile, the grace that was given me from God."

A phrase that speaks of His divine gift of apostleship. He was called, he was gifted, and he was empowered to proclaim the word of God with full authority. Because of this he was under divine compulsion to obey and serve the Lord.

"According to the grace given to me." Romans 12:6.

That's why he says in verse 16:

" And because of this grace is to be a ministry of Christ Jesus to the gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God that my offering of the gentiles might become acceptable sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

He uses the term priest here in a figurative way. To picture his role of bringing any offering to God. What is the offering? Believing gentiles. It was therefore by implication that he says that ultimately because of his calling, because he was commissioned. It's because of this that I can boldly remind you of these things that are so important.

Now think with me here for a moment of the stunning changes that took place when he brings the gospel of grace to the Gentiles. Gentiles who were formerly excluded from the holy place and the holy space of the temple. Because of Christ the old barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles were torn down and the Gentile believer becomes the offering in the most sacred place, one made acceptable by God by the regenerating power of the Spirit. It is for this reason that he boasts in God's grace in verse 17. Which, by the way, are the only legitimate grounds for boasting?

Now the issue of a priest can be confusing to many. Hopefully I can explain it very briefly. Under the old covenant there were men who were priests, there was a priesthood. They were men who guarded the covenant. They taught God's precepts and law; they offered incense and sacrifices on God's altar. They really served a dual, mediatorial role. They looked toward God on behalf of the people and they looked toward the people on behalf of God. But after Jesus made the final sacrifice and replaced the old covenant with the new, He became our perfect high priest. Hebrews 2:17. Believers no longer therefore have to go to a priest to a human mediator between God and man because according to 1 Timothy 2:5 there has been but one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

Now as we look at scripture we learn that every believer is a priest under the new covenant. We have direct access to our heavenly Father. We can go to Him and enjoy

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sweet fellowship and communion. We are even commanded to come boldly to the throne of grace because of what Christ has done on our behalf. Like Paul, when we bring others to Christ, you might say that we engage in a priestly function. Think of what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:5:

"As living stones we are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Verse 9 He goes on and says, "We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."

Why? "That we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light."

I want you to notice Paul also describes himself as a preacher. A preacher who boasted solely in the Lord who called in verse 17:

"Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God, 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."

My friends this should humble every preacher of the gospel. We have no room for boasting. All that we are, all that we do comes from the Lord. He alone gets the glory. Paul made this abundantly clear to his young protégé, Timothy; he wanted him to understand this in 1 Timothy 1 verse 12. He said:

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant."

John MacArthur has rightly said, "The people God uses to accomplish His will are His instruments and no Christian should take personal credit for what God does through him. No brush takes credit for a masterpiece it was used to paint. No violin takes credit for the beautiful music the musician makes with it. Neither should a Christian deny or belittle what God has done through him because that would be to deny and belittle God's own work."

So God has bestowed upon every believer a spiritual gift or gifts as the case may be. But how can you know what your spiritual gift is? By the fruit that it bears, by the affirmation of others. By the affirmation of how your life and service glorifies Christ. Paul's gift of a

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preacher was validated in a very dramatic way in verse 19. He reminds them that it was validated,

"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."

Now may I remind you that prior to the completion of the New Testament cannon in the days of the early church, God often used miraculous signs and wonders to authenticate both the message as well as the messenger of the gospel. In Mark 16 verse 20 we read that:

"And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed they word by the signs that followed."

But now that we have the full body of divine revelation, God no longer authenticates the message and the messenger with miraculous physical signs, but we do observe a wonderful, marvelous spiritual miracle. We see this all the time. And that is the miracle of regeneration. Where sinners at enmity with God are transformed into saints who become His willing and loving slaves. Can there be any greater affirmation of ministry than seeing God cause a man to be born again.

Paul goes on to describe his ministry, how he preached from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum. By the way that would have been a region that would cover about 1400 square miles. Think of the Mississippi all the way to California. By the way, as I think about it, the apostles and the others, my, they must have been some very stout men to be able to walk those great distances over their lifetime. But that was a region, my friends, where he suffered unimaginable hardship, persecution, ultimately gave his life to the gospel. But Paul was compelled to preach. In fact, he told the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 9:16:

"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." For I do this voluntarily, I have a stewardship entrusted to me."

So the apostle Paul was the quintessential pioneer missionary, evangelist and preacher, church planter. All though there is nothing wrong with building upon another man's ministry that was not Paul's strategy. He would take the seeds of the gospel and spread it in a new area and then move onto the next. He closes this section by saying in verse 20:

"And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build upon another man's foundation; but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD

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NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."

The quotation from Isaiah 52:15. Yet another attempt by the apostle to document the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the spread of the gospel to the non-Jewish world. I'm sure that this was a source of deep encouragement especially to those early gentile saints in Rome. It's certainly an encouragement to this gentile saint in America some 2000 years later.

Dear Christian I want you to examine your heart again as we leave this place today in light of these truths. In light of largely reminders that you already know, but that you've been reminded of again.

Accept one another. Think of some was that you can welcome into your friendship, into your circle of fellowship, maybe someone with whom you have differed in something that really doesn't matter.

Admonish one another. Perhaps there is someone in your life that you can think of right now that you need to come along side and encourage and instruct and warn. Do that because you are equipped to do so.

Remember what you know. Use every resource available to you to be reminded of the essential truths of the gospel and gospel living. Discipline your area in these realms. May we like Paul be tireless in preaching the gospel of grace that many will be saved and be made acceptable by the power of His spirit.

Let's pray together. Father thank you for these truths. They speak so directly to our lives. Help us by Your power to live consistently with them and to bear much fruit to the praise of Your glory. I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.