



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 47



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

FROM JERUSALEM TO ILLYRICUM

^{15:14} Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. ¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient; ¹⁹ in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand." ^{NKJV}
(Romans 15:14-21)

INTRODUCTION

There have been a variety of stern and weighty words delivered to the brethren in Rome. A recollection of some of them will serve to set the stage for the text before us.

"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (2:1).

"And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things,

and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" (2:3).

"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (2:5).

"Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written" (2:23-24).

"For if God spared not the natural

branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee" (11:21).

"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (13:11-12).

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he

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OUTLINE

- < CONFIDENCE CONCERNING SAINTS (15:14)
- < BOLD WRITING (15:15)
- < MINISTERING AND OFFERING (15:16)
- < A REASON TO GLORY (15:17)
- < GOD WORKING THROUGH A MAN (15:18-19)
- < I MADE IT MY AIM (15:20-21)
- < HINDERED FOR A REASON (15:22-23)

standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand” (14:4).

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (14:10).

“Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (14:13).

Now, with great care, the Apostle assures the brethren in Rome that he has not spoken to them as though they were wayward and thoughtless souls. **Strong exhortations and solemn warnings are not delivered in a spirit of criticism.** Nor, indeed, are they suggestions that the people of God have become reprehensible and worthy of condemnation. They are designed to awaken believers to alertness and vigilance, both of which are essential to living by faith and walking in the Spirit.

Many a timorous soul does not see these things. They hear words of warning

as though they were addressed to them personally, without regard to anyone else. While there may be times when such responses are in order, they generally tend to close the ears rather than open them, and to harden the heart rather than make it supple and responsive.

IN THIS WORLD, THE SAINTS HAVE TWO NATURES

As long as they are in this world, or “*in the body*,” the saints have two competing natures.

The Flesh

The remnants of the Adamic nature remain with them. This is the nature passed along to all of Adam’s progeny, when “*by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners*” (Rom 5:19). This nature is called “*the flesh*” (Rom 7:25), “*my flesh*” (Rom 7:18), “*the natural man*” (1 Cor 2:14), the “*old man*” (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), and “*our members that are upon the earth*” (Col 3:5).

This part of our being is tied to our bodies, and will remain with us as long as we are in the body. Because this part of our persons is hostile toward God, it is to be “*crucified*” (Gal 5:24), “*mortified*” (Rom 8:13), and “*no provision*” made for it (Rom 13:14).

The New Man

Those who are in Christ Jesus possess a new nature. It is described as being “*born*

described as a change from one stage of glory to another – a work wrought by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).

THE CIRCUMSTANCE

The circumstance of the hostility between these two natures is what occasions all exhortations, beseechments, and admonitions. Even though believers may not have lapsed into extreme spiritual insensitivity, yet that capacity remains in them as long as they are in the body. Thus, strong texts like those mentioned above, are to be received by all saints. They are not to be considered applicable only to those who have indulged in the transgressions that have been mentioned.

This condition is also what allows for comfort to be ministered in the very Epistle containing strong rebukes. The rebukes are delivered to the flesh. The comforts are addressed to the new creation. This manner of communication can be traced throughout the Epistles.

‘ **Believers are addressed as those who are called by God, accepted in Christ, and having full access to God.**

‘ **Expressions of the flesh are soundly condemned, and believers are urged to rid themselves of all forms of sin.**

‘ **Promises, prayers, and spiritual advantages are set before believers to encourage and stabilize them in the faith.**

This consistent approach confirms

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of God” (1 John 5:4), and is a “*new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17), “*created unto good works*” (Eph 2:10). This is the “*new man*” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), “*inner man*” (Eph 3:16), and “*inward man*” (Rom 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16). This is presently the part of us that is being “*conformed to the image*” of God’s Son (Rom 8:29). That conformation is

the nature of life in Christ Jesus – how it is lived in the arena of inner conflict, as well as oppositions from the world. That is precisely why comforting words like those that follow can be delivered after all manner of rebuke and correction. We have every reason to be thankful for this Divine and profitable arrangement.

CONFIDENCE CONCERNING SAINTS

“^{15:14} Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that

you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to

admonish one another.” From time to time, it is needful to assure the saints of

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our confidence in their progress. While this is not common in our day, it represents a Divine manner of stimulating spiritual life and sensitivity. If, indeed, we do have a “new man,” he ought to be addressed. There are words God has inspired that particularly apply to the “new creation,” and they are to be spoken without fear of contradiction. The Lord Jesus Himself followed this procedure. A few examples of this can be seen in His message to the churches in *Asia*.

THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS. Jesus recognized and commended their works, labor, patience, and that they could not endure evil men. They also hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes,

works were more than their former. Notwithstanding, He held against them the fact that they allowed a false prophetess among them to seduce His servants. He held before this church the promise that those who overcame would be given power over the nations, and would be given the “morning star” (Rev 2:18-28).

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS. The Lord saw very little in Sardis that could be commended. He did mention some things that remained that could be strengthened. Urging them to recall how they had received, he exhorted them to hold fast and repent. He also confessed there were a few souls there

manner of the Kingdom, and to substantiate how the Apostle reflects this fashion in his writings. It is important that the people of God see this Kingdom quality. **Whatever an individual has that has come to him through Christ Jesus – however miniscule it may appear – is to be nourished, cultured, and fanned into a flame.**

I MYSELF AM CONFIDENT

“Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren.” Other versions read, “I myself also am persuaded,” ^{KJV} *“I myself also am convinced,”* ^{NASB} *“I myself feel confident about you,”* ^{NRSV} and *“am assured of you.”* ^{DRA}

This is the language of faith, and is often articulated by holy men. “. . . *having confidence in you all . . . I have confidence in you in all things . . . the great confidence which I have in you . . . I have confidence in you through the Lord . . . we have confidence in the Lord touching you . . . Having confidence in thy obedience*” (2 Cor 2:3; 7:16; 8:22; Gal 5:10; 2 Thess 3:4; Phile 1:21).

This kind of confidence is also expressed in other ways.

- ‘ *“The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me”* (Psa 138:8).
- ‘ *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil 1:6).
- ‘ *“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it”* (1 Thess 5:23-24).
- ‘ *“Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power”* (2 Thess 1:11).
- ‘ *“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you”* (1 Pet 5:10).
- ‘ *“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”* (Heb 13:20-21).

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which Jesus also hated. The Lord held against them the fact that they had left their first love. He promised those who overcame that He would give them access to the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev 2:1-7).

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS. Jesus commended them for holding His name fast, and not denying His name – in a place where Satan had his throne. This faithfulness took place in a time of fierce persecution, when Antipas was martyred for Christ. Yet, Jesus had some things against this church, for they had some among them who taught the doctrine of Balaam, casting stumbling blocks before Christ’s servants. Still, He held the promise before them that those who overcame would be given to eat hidden manna, and would be given a new name, known only to those receiving it (Rev 2:12-17).

THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA. Jesus recognized their works, charity, service, faith, and patience. He also commended them because their latter

who had not denied His name. After telling them they had a name that they were alive, but were actually dead, He held out a precious promise to them. Those who overcame would be clothed in white raiment, would not have their name blotted out of the book of life, and would have their name confessed before the Father and the holy angels by Himself (Rev 3:1-6).

THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA. This was the only Asian church of which Jesus said nothing good – other than acknowledging them as His own. They had a completely erroneous view of their condition, imagining they had no need of anything. Yet Jesus counseled them to procure what they sorely needed from Him personally. He then held before them two most unusual promises. First, He affirmed that He would personally sup with any individual who would grant Him access to their person. Second, He said the ones overcoming would be granted to sit with Him in His throne (Rev 3:14-21).

I have taken this time to confirm the

The work of God is helped along by

expressions of confidence in His great and effective power. He is, after all, *“able to make”* believers stand (Rom 14:4). He can *“make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”* (2 Cor 9:8). He is fully *“able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24).

This confidence is produced when faith is perceived in a person or group of persons. Paul testified that he was bound to give thanks for the Thessalonians because their faith was growing exceedingly, and their love toward each other was abounding (2 Thess 1:3). They maintained their faith and persevered in all of their persecutions and tribulations (2 Thess 1:4). These conditions justified the strong confidence Paul had concerning these brethren.

When faith is not prominent in those professing identity with Christ Jesus, it is not possible to have this kind of confidence. In such a case, strong reproofs and exhortations are required to stimulate people to live by faith and walk in the Spirit. No other manner of life is acceptable to the Lord. However, where faith and love are in strong and abundant evidence, saints are to be addressed in the manner of this passage. This tends to encourage faith and stabilize hope. It may be done without hesitation or fear.

FULL OF GOODNESS

“Now I myself am confident . . . that you also are full of goodness. . . .” Every major translation reads exactly the same: *“full of goodness.”* This is a most remarkable expression – particularly when you recall the state of all men by nature: *“there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (3:12). What a marvelous work has taken place in those once numbered among those who did no good at all. Now, by the grace of God, they are *“full of goodness.”*

This is not *“goodness”* that has been generated by men. Rather, it has been received from God. When God summarized the revelation of His glory to Moses, He declared He was going to *“make all My goodness pass before thee”* (Ex 33:19). As He passed before Moses,

sheltered in the cleft of a rock by His hand, He *“proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God . . . abundant in goodness and truth”* (Ex 34:6). In the well known twenty-third Psalm, David confessed, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life”* (Psa 23:6). Again, the Psalmist confessed, *“Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!”* (Psa 31:19). Here is a Divine quality that is *“stored up”*^{NIV} for those who fear the Lord. This is a great repository reserved

character of the individual.

To be *“full of goodness”* is to be consistent in choosing the good things of God and refusing the delusions of the devil. It is to possess the qualities of gentleness and generosity, kindness and purity. This a quality that comes from God, and it reflects His own nature. Goodness is properly traced back to God. Thus we read of *“the goodness of God”* (Psa 52:1; Rom 2:4). Like the righteousness of God, this is not a mere human attempt to be like God, but is a participation in the Divine nature (2 Pet

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The word *“goodness”* is not easy to define. It is a quality that includes generosity, a willingness to give, and uprightness of heart. Ultimately, these are traits of God Himself. Yet, He is *“willing more abundantly”* (Heb 6:17) to share this *“goodness”* with those who believe the record He has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11).

Technically, to be *“filled with all goodness”* means to be filled with a kind and benevolent spirit. This included their love for one another, and toward all saints. They were disposed to give of themselves and be kind. More specifically, I believe, this fulness refers to their disposition to do what the Lord required, and to extend themselves to yield a pure and uncompromising obedience to Him.

“Goodness” is included in the *“fruit of the Spirit”* (Gal 5:22), and embraces the idea of moral excellence. Moral excellence is the ability to choose good and reject evil – an ability that is woven into the

1:4). To be *“full of goodness”* is involved in being *“filled with all the fulness of God”* (Eph 3:19). It is to receive *“of His fulness, and grace for grace”* (John 1:16).

When, therefore, Paul says he was persuaded the brethren in Rome were *“full of goodness,”* he is recognizing a most significant quality. These brethren had the capacity to regard one another just as God regarded them. Unlike the Corinthians, there were not divisions among them. Being full of goodness implies being *“kindly affectioned toward one another”* (Rom 12:10), *“tenderhearted, forgiving one another”* (Eph 4:32), and *“forbearing one another”* (Col 3:13). How marvelous to be confident that certain believers are filled with such a exceedingly great quality!

FILLED WITH ALL KNOWLEDGE

“Now I myself am confident . . . that you also are . . . filled with all knowledge.” Other versions read, *“complete in knowledge,”*^{NIV} *“replenished with all knowledge,”*^{DRA} *“you know these things,”*^{NLT} and *“fully instructed.”*^{NJB}

Now Paul heaps virtue upon virtue.

The blessing of the Lord does not come in sparse measures, and thus the servant of God does not think in small ways! Here is a condition that is exactly the opposite of men's status by nature. The Divine assessment of men apart from involvement with Deity is, "there is none that understandeth" (Rom 3:12). The lack of the knowledge of reference is what alienates people from the life of God. Thus it is written, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:18).

The Apostle here acknowledges that

word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts"^{NKJV} (2 Pet 1:19).

This type of knowledge enables the individual to fulfill this word: "correctly handling the Word of truth"^{NIV} (2 Tim 2:15). The idea is that the Roman brethren had an understanding of the things of God. We will find this is not mere worldly wisdom. Although an acquaintance with religious history and familiarity with the technicalities of language are not of themselves bad, that is not the type of cognition here acknowledged. There is a superior

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a fundamental change has taken place in these brethren. Rather than being destitute of this vital knowledge, now they are filled with it. This is a sort of Kingdom intelligence – being conversant with the manner of the Kingdom. In this acknowledgment Paul confirms he is persuaded he has not been speaking mysteries to them. He is convinced a responsive note has been struck in their hearts. They know what he has been talking about.

This is not the rudimentary knowledge that flows from a familiarity with facts and the employment of human logic or reasoning. Rather, this is the knowledge that results from being "enlightened" (Eph 1:18; Heb 6:4), or "illuminated" (Heb 10:32). It is related to the "day dawning," and "the day star" rising in the heart (2 Pet 1:19). Rather than this kind of knowledge excluding an acquaintance with the Word of God, it is the result of faithful and consistent exposure to it – particularly the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Thus it is written of the Gospel, "And so we have the prophetic

knowledge that allows one to confidently handle the good things of God. **It involves insight into Divine objectives, and the ability to correlate Scripture with those objectives.** It is not possible to have such knowledge without a significant grasp of the text of Scripture. Nor, indeed, will an intellectual grasp of the Bible bring such knowledge when the heart is not pure and in fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Keep in mind, our text is not commending a few advanced brethren among the Roman congregation. It is the body of believers themselves that have provoked this confidence in the Apostle. The exceeding rarity of such congregations confirms the marvelous achievements of the brethren in Rome. It is certainly a noble goal for any fellowship of believers to strive to be noted as being filled with goodness and knowledge. Such ambitions are virtually unknown among American churches. After over fifty years of extensive exposure to the numerous churches, I can only recall a very few who

have ever articulated or evidenced such an ambition. I know of few, if any, Christian educational institutions that presently have this as a stated and formal objective. **However, this is a Divine aim, and the whole of salvation contributes to its realization.** The Scriptures are declared to have been inspired by God in order to "make the man of God perfect" (2 Tim 3:17). Christ has given gifts to the church "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). There is no justifiable reason for the church of our day to be ignorant of these realities.

The brethren in Rome, therefore, were not being commended because they had gone further than normal. Rather, they were commended for availing themselves of the things that are provided in Christ Jesus. Anything less than this is spiritually abnormal.

ABLE TO ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER

"Now I myself am confident . . . that you also are . . . able also to admonish one another." Other versions read, "competent to instruct one another,"^{NIV} "able to instruct one another,"^{NRSV} and "able to give direction to one another."^{BBE}

This is the objective of being "full of goodness" and "filled with all knowledge."

Having an abundance of goodness and knowledge is not an end of itself. There is an appointed purpose for kindness, gentleness, generosity, knowledge, and understanding. These qualities equip believers to bring certain advantages to one another. To be more specific, they are designed to enable the believer to join the Savior in bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). Jesus is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18), and preparing us for "the great and notable day of the Lord." **While He assists us through our difficulties, subdues our enemies, and provides our daily necessities, that is by no means the burden or fundamental objective of His ministry to us.**

Not a single one of the covenantal benefits is temporal in nature. None of them are primarily external. Consider again how glorious is the revelation of the these benefits.

- ' **A MINISTRY TO THE MIND.** *"I will put my laws into their mind"* (Heb 8:10a).
- ' **A MINISTRY TO THE HEART.** *"I will . . . write them in their hearts"* (Heb 8:10b).
- ' **A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** *"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people"* (Heb 8:10c).
- ' **A PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.** *"And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest"* (Heb 8:11).
- ' **THE REMOVAL OF SIN.** *"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more"* (Heb 8:12).

God, Christ Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit ever depart from, or minimize this revealed agenda! Nothing that They do ever upstages this work, or puts it into the background. **At the precise point these things become of little consequence to those who profess faith, their involvement with Deity starts to terminate,** for there are no other reasons for fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Being *"able also to admonish one another"* blends with the work and promises of God. It is harmonious with the intercessory and mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus. It combines with the strengthening and directing ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is all by Divine design and appointment. It is not the result of human wisdom or strategy, but is the consequence of living by faith and walking in the Spirit.

The Thessalonians were exhorted to

know and appreciate those who admonished them (1Thess 5:12). The Colossians were exhorted to be filled with the Spirit and thereby admonish one another (Col 3:16). **Our text acknowledges not only the necessity of this ministry, but the capability of the brethren who are addressed to actually engage in the work.** They did not require the intervention of someone outside of their own fellowship. Paul is not, then, speaking as though their

"longsuffering," and "kindness," and is "by the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 6:6).

Admonishing one another relates to assisting one another to remain and make progress on the highway of holiness (Isa 35:8). It is associated with provoking one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24). It HAS to do with edifying one another (Rom 14:19; 1 Thess 5:11). Such ACTIVITY moves believers beyond the role of mere

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ministry to one another relied upon him. Rather, he is stirring up what is already in them, confirming what they are able to do in perfect accord with God's purpose.

With goodness and knowledge combined in the heart of a people, they at once become competent to reprove, correct, and instruct in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). But these virtues – goodness and knowledge – must reside in the people. A *"good man"* is, by Scriptural definition, one who is walking with the Lord. *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD"* (Psa 37:23). *"A good man obtaineth favor of the LORD"* (Prov 12:2). Jesus declared, *"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things"* (Matt 12:35). The *"knowledge"* of reference keeps company with *"purity,"*

It opens both their hearts and their mouths, and makes them *"profitable"* to one another (2 Tim 4:11; Philemon 11).

An Observation

Without being unduly critical, such virtues are exceedingly rare in the contemporary American congregation. It is not unusual to find churches, who have a reputation for being successful, to be able to boast in nothing more than a lot of people and elaborate facilities. The ability to admonish one another is rarely, if ever, mentioned, much less actually displayed. Nevertheless, being full of goodness, knowledge, and the ability to admonish one another, ranks high with God. Where these are found, a good work has been, and is being, done to the glory of God. Such works are to be commended.

BOLD WRITING

"¹⁵ Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God . . ." At no point does life in the Spirit switch to some form of automation that requires no more involvement on the part of individual or collective believers. It

should not surprise us that this is not generally revealed in the conduct and teaching of the average congregation. Many who argue extensively against lifeless views of perseverance, like "once saved always saved," actually practice the doctrine. Professed believers are often less zealous than they were when they first

came into Christ. Their diligence has diminished, as well as their sensitivity and tenderness. Yet, they imagine themselves to still be accepted by God, even though they are drifting further and further from the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and the persuasion that God is able to

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keep what they have committed to Him (2 Tim 1:12).

However, such thoughts are only imaginations, perpetrated and fostered by the wicked one. There is not a jot or tittle of truth in them. God has no delight in those who draw back from Him, even declaring that such are progressing to *“perdition,”* or condemnation (Heb 10:38-39). This is precisely why Paul is elaborating on these things to the brethren in Rome, and us as well. He does not take spiritual life for granted, or suppose that what we have received from God works independently of human involvement.

NEVERTHELESS

“Nevertheless . . .” This is a small but meaningful word that indicates an extended thought. It is akin to what we would call an explanation or elaboration.

Even though God’s laws have been put into our minds and written upon our hearts (Heb 8:10), yet continual attention must be given to our hearts and minds in order that the writing may remain fresh.

It indicates the further development of a thought. That development is not required because of a fundamental deficiency in the character of the readers, for they were *“full of goodness.”* It is not necessary to speak in this manner because the readers were lacking in understanding, for they were *“full of all knowledge.”* Nor, indeed, did Paul speak in this way because the brethren in Rome were not able to build one another up. They were, in fact, *“able to admonish one another.”* Why, then, continue in this line of thought?

It is because we are *not “sufficient of ourselves”* (2 Cor 3:5). The very nature of life in Christ Jesus requires frequent spiritual stimulus – even from those who may not personally know us. At the point of writing, Paul had never been to Rome. He had heard of their faith (1:5), and was determined to bring advantages to them *“to the end”* they might be *“established”* (1:9-11). They were, indeed, *“able to admonish one another,”* but that ability

must be stirred up and often provoked in order to be effective.

Many a congregation with noble beginnings has fallen asleep simply because it was never stirred by words of admonition and exhortation. Perhaps people thought their leaders were sufficient to carry the congregation forward without too much involvement by all of the brothers and sisters. **When the people of God are not stimulated by powerful exhortations and reminders of the greatness of what they have received, they will make no advance.** That is why Paul writes.

MORE BOLDLY

“I have written more boldly to you on some points.” Other versions read, *“I have been bold enough to emphasize some of these points,”*^{NLT} and *“rather boldly in*

some respects.”^{NAB}

There is a threefold sense in which this boldness has been evidenced.

First, Paul had admonished them, even though they were, he confessed, capable of admonishing one another. That required some degree of boldness. There is no place for cliques in the work of the Lord. The fact that an individual may never have companied with a particular congregation does not mean he ought not boldly speak of the truth to them.

Second, he had declared some things to them that could be abrasive. You may recall some of those expressions. *“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosever thou art that judges . . . Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself. . . Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey . . . For to be carnally minded is death . . . Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? . . . Boast not*

against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee . . . But why dost thou judge thy brother?” (2:1,21; 6:16; 8:6; 9:20; 11:18; 14:10). These solemn sayings were not intended to single out certain people, or denigrate the congregation in Rome. Rather, they were a means of checking the expressions of the flesh, which is every with us.

Third, Paul had not founded the church in Rome, yet had written extensively to them in this Epistle. The flesh would object to this action, saying the affairs in Rome were none of his business. However, he was writing as the appointed Apostle to the Gentiles, and not one who sought to impose his own views on others. He was not a meddler, but an Apostle, ordained to minister the truth to the people of God.

REMINING YOU

“ . . . as reminding you.” Other versions read, *“as putting you in mind,”*^{KJV} *“as if to remind you of them again,”*^{NIV} and *“knowing that all you need is this reminder from me.”*^{NLT}

The ministry of helping the saints to remember is a vital one. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to *“remind”* them of his ministry (1 Cor 4:17). He reminded Timothy himself of the gift that was given to him (2 Tim 1:6). He admonished Timothy to remind brethren not to strive about words (2 Tim 2:14). He also exhorted Titus to remind brethren to be subject to the higher powers, obey, and be ready for every good work (Tit 3:1). Peter said he would not be negligent to remind the brethren of the things of God, even though they were established in the truth (2 Pet 1:12). He knew that even *“pure minds”* had to be stirred up by holy remembrances (2 Pet 3:1).

While we remain in these *“earthen vessels”* (2 Cor 4:7), the precious things of God tend to get away from us. **Even though God’s laws have been put into our minds and written upon our hearts (Heb 8:10), yet continual attention must be given to our hearts and minds in order that the writing may remain fresh.** This is why Jesus instituted the *“Lord’s supper”* (1 Cor 11:20). It is a feast of remembrance

whereby the recollection of the Savior can remain fresh and effective.

Thus Paul writes to bring what the brethren already know to the forefront of their thinking. Life in the flesh tends to push the things of God into the background of thought. Exhortation and admonition bring them into the foreground. There is a reason for the necessity of such stimuli. **When the things of God are not dominant in our thinking, they are no longer effective.** When the truth of God is put into the shadows, while the mind becomes occupied with lesser things, it no longer exercises its power to free the soul.

Those who have a practice of absenting themselves from the fellowship of brethren in Christ (Heb 10:25), or who neglect the reading of, and meditation in, the Holy Scriptures, have put themselves in a situation where the truth cannot flourish in their hearts. In fact, it may not even be able to survive in them. The fiercely competitive moral arena that we occupy demands the stirring up of pure minds. They must not be left unattended.

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BECAUSE OF GRACE

“ . . . because of the grace given to me by God.” Paul does not write as a meddler in other men’s affairs. Nor, indeed, is he writing as a dictator who demands his own way. He is writing as a “steward of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet 4:10). God had adapted him for this ministry. It was not something he took upon himself. His role in the body of Christ was “by the grace of God” (1 Cor 15:10). The manner in which he ministered was “not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God” NKJV (2 Cor 1:12). He was fulfilling a Divinely appointed role in so ministering to them.

Many a soul, attempting to do something in the name of the Lord, has met with miserable failure. Often, this is because they have sought to do something for which grace had not suited them. **While care must be taken not to assume those who appear to fail have really had no grace, care must also be taken not to launch out in the energy of the flesh.**

When it comes to speaking to the saints of God, or caring for the house of God, there is no place for assumption. Those who minister must have some degree of confidence that they are doing what God has given them to do.

MINISTERING AND OFFERING

“¹⁶ . . . that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Here is a most interesting perspective. The aim of the Apostle was not merely to correct the brethren in Rome. Nor, indeed, was it only to increase their knowledge of the things of God. His activities were a labor of love, with the firm intent to be a servant used by Jesus Christ. He was seeking to be faithful to his stewardship, for “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2). In that activity, Jesus would receive glory, the saints would receive benefits, and he would receive a reward.

A MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ.” Other versions read, “that I should be the minister,”^{KJV} and “to be a

minister.”^{NIV} **This is WHY He was given grace; i.e., in order to be a minister, or servant, of Jesus Christ.**

Many think of the grace of God only in regard to the remission of sin, justification, and sanctification. And, indeed, grace is the root for all of those marvelous gifts. But grace also has to do with ministry – with serving the Lord and being a laborer in His vineyard. That is precisely why Peter admonished believers to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God . . . ministering “as of the ability which God giveth” (1 Pet 4:10-11). In a day of religious professionalism, much emphasis is being placed on training laborers for the Kingdom. While this is not an unworthy work, it IS a work unworthy of emphasis. **The key factor in laboring for the Lord is NOT the amount of training one receives, but the grace that has been given to him.** That grace has adapted such an one for a

certain work, and he is to be busy in fulfilling it, as Paul is in fulfilling the work for which grace suited him.

The sense of this verse, then, is this: I have written boldly to you, stirring up your minds with matters already familiar to you. I know you are able to admonish one another because you are filled with goodness and knowledge. Yet, I am doing so because I have been appointed to this work, and have been suited for it by the grace of God. We learn from this that God does not leave His people with limited resources. No congregation is sufficient of itself. If such a thing was possible, it would have been true of the brethren in Rome. Their faith had been spoken of throughout the world. They were filled with all goodness and all knowledge, and were thus able to admonish one another. There were a number of spiritually elite people among them, as is confirmed in the next chapter (16:3-15). Paul also knew he would profit from their mutual faith (1:12). Yet he

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ministered to them in the power of the grace that had been given to him.

TO THE GENTILES

The focus of Paul's Apostleship was the Gentiles – the nations of the world who had been cut off from all affiliation with the Living God. God did not intend for him to labor **exclusively** among the Gentiles. When the Lord sent Ananias to instruct Saul of Tarsus, He told him *"he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and **kings**, and **the children of Israel**"* (Acts 9:15). Indeed, Paul did bear the name of Christ before *"kings"* (Acts 25:22-27; 26:1-11; 27:24), and *"the children of Israel"* as well (Acts 13:14-15; 14:1; 17:1-21; 8:4). However, the burden of his ministry was to the Gentiles, *"which know not God"* (1 Thess 4:5).

It was much the same with Peter, who

sacrificial service the {message of} glad tidings of God."^{DARBY} Here Paul assumes the role of a priest, **preparing** a sacrifice to offer up to the Lord. The Gospel of God is to that sacrifice what salt was to the sacrifice under the Law: it made the sacrifice acceptable (Lev 2:13).

"The Gospel of God" portrays the Gospel at its most foundational level. This depiction of the Gospel is used seven times in Scripture (Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thess 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet 4:17). The Gospel is the good news of the working of God. He *"so loved the world"* (John 3:16), *"sent"* the Son into the world (1 John 4:14), and *"delivered Him up"* for the sins of the world (Rom 8:32). Jesus came to do His will (John 4:34), in bringing us to God.

It is *"God"* that was *"in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not*

who are **not** in Christ. Our text shines a bright light upon such statements, showing how utterly foolish they are. Rome was a well established church, whose faith had been chronicled throughout the world. They were filled with goodness and all knowledge, and able to admonish one another. Yet Paul ministered *"the Gospel of God"* to them – and that, quite extensively (chapters 3-8).

THE OFFERING OF THE GENTILES

" . . . that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable." Other versions read, *"that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable,"*^{NASB} *"so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God,"*^{NIV} Here is the priestly service Paul is fulfilling. He is offering up the Gentiles to the Living God. That is why he has salted them with *"the Gospel of God."*

There is a sort of spiritual naivete that is extant in the professed church. It assumes Divine acceptance too easily. Trite sayings like "receive Christ into your heart," and "God loves you just the way you are," blur the truth rather than clarifying it. **Here is Paul, writing to Gentiles who are in Christ Jesus, speaking of making the offering of them acceptable to God.**

The offering of which he speaks is a *"living sacrifice,"* that is, one that is ongoing or continual. The very notion of offering *"the Gentiles"* to God is a most arresting one – particularly when you are speaking of believing and justified Gentiles. It is the flavor of the Gospel that provides for such acceptance. **I have every reason to believe that when the Gospel of God ceases to be declared, the acceptance of the people begins to diminish.** It is as though God will not allow for favor to continue where the proclamation of His love and grace are no longer heard. The ramifications of this are sufficient to promote great sobriety and diligence.

SANCTIFIED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

" . . . sanctified by the Holy Spirit." That is, the offering up of the Gentiles is made acceptable to God through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Further, that sanctifying work depends upon the ministry of *"the Gospel of God."*

See how versatile those tutored by grace become! In this world, specialists often confine themselves to one thing. But it is not so in the Kingdom. Special abilities in one area by no means imply incompetence in other areas.

was primarily an Apostle to the Jews, or *"the circumcision"* (Gal 2:7). Yet, he is the very man Jesus used to *"open the door of faith"* to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18).

See how versatile those tutored by grace become! In this world, *specialists* often confine themselves to one thing. But it is not so in the Kingdom. Special abilities in one area by no means imply incompetence in other areas.

MINISTERING THE GOSPEL OF GOD

" . . . ministering the Gospel; of God." Paul took up collections of money for needy Jewish brethren (Acts 11:28-30; Rom 15:25-27; 1 Cor 16:1-5), but He ministered *"the Gospel of God"* to the Gentiles.

Other versions read, *"ministering as a priest the gospel of God,"*^{NASB} *"with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God,"*^{NIV} *"in the priestly service of the gospel of God,"*^{NRSV} *"carrying on as a*

imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor 5:18-20). When Jesus delivered us *"from this present evil world,"* it was *"according of the will of God and our Father"* (Gal 1:4). This is marvelous to hear when you consider that sin had alienated us *"from the life of God"* (Eph 4:18). It is no wonder it is called, *"the Gospel of God."*

The Indispensable Role of the Gospel

If men are going to made acceptable to God, the *"Gospel of God"* must be ministered to them. This is not good news that God can meet your need, or answer your problems – although those benefits result from fellowship with Him. The Gospel is not against the background of human misery and hardship, but against the blackness of the alienating effects of transgression, and death in trespasses and sins (Rom 1:1-3:19).

It is fashionable in some circles to say the Gospel is only preached to those

The Holy Spirit does not work with the philosophies and reasonings of men. They may have a pleasant sound to them, but they have no utility whatsoever in making men acceptable to God.

What marvelous involvements there are in people being made acceptable to God! In this text, we are reminded that the sound of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit are indispensable to that acceptance – **and both of those are outside of our own persons.** Although by nature, the Gentiles were “*sinners*,” the Holy Spirit had washed, sanctified, and justified them (1 Cor 6:11). It is His ministry that has made them good enough to be received by a thrice holy God. Salvation itself is related to the “*sanctification of the Spirit*,” as well as “*the belief of the truth*” (2 Thess 2:13).

Even though the saved are said to be “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God*,” that election was carried out “*through sanctification of the Spirit*,” and was in order to “*obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 1:2).

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit separates us from alienating defilements, and puts us in a position where we can be received by God. Without this work, God cannot receive us!

Ponder what is involved in people being offered up to God in a way that is pleasing to Him.

This acceptance required the tutelage of the Law, or the awakening to our sinful condition (Rom 3:19-20). It required the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, enthronement, and

intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 4:4; 1 Cor 15:3; Rom 1:4; Eph 1:23; Heb 7:25).

It was, and continues to be, necessary that “*the Gospel of God*” be ministered (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 15:1-3).

The convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit preceded our acceptance (John 16:8-11).

The Holy Spirit initially, and on an ongoing basis, cleanses, sanctifies, and qualifies us for Divine acceptance (1 Cor 1:30; Rom 5:5; 15:13).

Such extensive involvements, when perceived, will contribute to faithfulness and diligence. They also illuminate why the righteous are said to “*scarcely be saved*” (1 Pet 4:18). It is **ONLY** He that is in us that is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). By nature, we are “*not sufficient of ourselves*.”

A REASON TO GLORY

“¹⁷ Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.” In this verse and those that follow, Paul is providing evidence for his right to speak with such authority. He will point us to the effectiveness of the Gospel that he preached. God Himself had supported his message, which was reason enough for the Gentiles to heartily embrace it.

I HAVE REASON

“*Therefore I have reason . . .*” There is no reason for men to boast in themselves, for they had to be saved from their own doing. That does not mean that all glorying, or boasting, is unlawful. **There are justifiable reasons for glorying**, but they do not lie in men themselves. It is therefore written, “*But he who glories, let him glory in the LORD*” (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). That is precisely what Paul does in this text.

God had made Paul both adequate and effective, and he gloried in those conditions. Elsewhere he wrote, “*Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a*

sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things” (2 Cor 2:14-16).

Indeed, Paul confessed “*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency*

“*. . . to glory in Christ Jesus . . .*” The idea is that Paul is glorying in all of the things Christ has accomplished through him. The New Living Translation captures this sense. “*So it is right for me to be enthusiastic about all Christ Jesus has done through me.*” Paul’s wisdom is not what made him effective. His earthly pedigree and expertise in the Law and the Prophets was not the source of his

Paul’s wisdom is not what made him effective. His earthly pedigree and expertise in the Law and the Prophets was not the source of his effectiveness. It was Christ who was living in Him (Gal 2:20), and it is Christ who receives the glory, even though it comes from Paul.

is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament” (2 Cor 3:5-6). How marvelous to have such evidence as promotes lawful glorying!

GLORYING IN CHRIST JESUS

effectiveness. It was Christ who was living in Him (Gal 2:20), and it is Christ who receives the glory, even though it comes from Paul.

The King James Version reads, “*I may*

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glory **through** Jesus Christ.” This sense is also included in the verse, that Jesus Himself has enabled Paul to glory in an acceptable manner. He not only worked through Paul’s labors, but expressed praise through His mouth. This is the fruitage of being a “*laborer together with God*” (1 Cor 3:9).

THINGS WHICH PERTAIN TO GOD

“... in the things which pertain to God.” Other versions read, “*my service to God*,”^{NIV} “*my work for God*,”^{NRSV} and “*the things which are God’s*.”^{BBE} There are things that we do that are to God, but are not pertaining to God. Such matters relate to laboring for an earthly master, or

children obeying their parents, yet doing it “*as unto the Lord*” (Eph 6:5; Col 3:20). These are not the areas where boasting is acceptable. Nor, indeed, are they the point of Divine emphasis. They are temporal in nature, and morally necessary. Thus, they are to be done “*unto the Lord*.”

This text speaks of a more lofty and enduring work. It has to do with the commissions of grace, which enable a person to labor together with God in His great “*eternal purpose*” (Eph 3:11). **Care must be taken in speaking of this matter, lest men view earthly duties with disdain.** Equally, care must be taken when addressing earthly

obligations, lest men conclude in doing them they have fulfilled their duty to God.

God has positioned the members in Christ’s body “*as it hath pleased Him*” (1 Cor 12:18). Each position is accompanied with “*a measure of faith*” (Rom 12:3), and enabling grace (1 Pet 4:11). As those various roles are fulfilled in the power of the Spirit, Christ working through the individual, one may glory in Christ Jesus for the effectiveness of that work. That is what Paul is doing in this text. He has seen the work of Christ in himself. The person who sees the sense of this has been blessed. Such will find great satisfaction in their labors, and be able to glory in the Lord.

GOD WORKING THROUGH A MAN

“¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient; ¹⁹ in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and

However, when glorying is done in the work of some peer or peers, that glorying tends to detract from the Lord Jesus Christ. It is too impersonal, and does not promote thanksgiving as much as the type of glorying Paul here displays. The greater testimony regards the work in you.

something about lifeless theological positions and institutions that contradict the spirit of this expression. There is all manner of speaking today that has nothing whatsoever to do with what Christ has done in the individual. All such speaking, or boasting, is in the work of some other man or men. Paul will not allow himself to indulge in such a display of vanity. He will not speak extensively about things which Christ has not accomplished through him. Such a procedure would bring a great wave of silence in many church circles.

There is something about lifeless theological positions and institutions that contradict the spirit of this expression. There is all manner of speaking today that has nothing whatsoever to do with what Christ has done in the individual.

round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”

When it comes to godly boasting, Paul will not glory in the work of another, as though he was an integral part of such a work. He will only glory in what the Lord has done through him! He will not glory in an institution, or a movement, or what the Lord is doing through a particular group. There is a reason for his insistence upon confining his glorying to what the Lord has done through him personally. It certainly is not that he did not give thanks for the work of others.

Such observations may appear completely inconsequential to some. However, they do have some relevance to a discussion of this text. It is as though every man will glory in something – at least that is the tendency. Far better, therefore, to look for the working of Christ through us personally. Your experience in the Lord should confirm the truth of this to your heart.

I WILL NOT DARE TO SPEAK

“*For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me . . .*” There is

Speaking of what God has done through individuals is not uncommon in the Word of God. “*And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them*” (Acts 14:27). “*Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them*” (Acts 15:12). Peter once said, “*Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe*” (Acts 15:7).

Godly people have no cause to be ashamed to declare what the Lord has done through them. They must, however, avoid any tendency to get caught up in the work of others, even though it is legitimate, and is accomplished by Jesus.

Accomplished through Me

“ . . . accomplished through me.”
 Other versions read “wrought by me,”^{KJV}
 “done by me,”^{BBE} and “done through me.”
^{NJB} **Herein is a most marvelous Kingdom principle, that Christ does things through people!** This is involved in Christ living in us (Gal 2:20), us laboring with God (1 Cor 3:9), and God working in us to will and to do (Phil 2:13).

There remains in religious men the uncomely tendency to think of God as only working independently of the redeemed. Thus, snared by “voluntary humility” (Col 2:18), they do not think of themselves as resources to the Living God. They cannot conceive of the Lord Jesus working through them, but only think of themselves as receiving from the Lord. While receiving from the Lord is not in any way to be minimized, it is the outflow of life that especially brings glory to God. Thus Jesus declared, “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, **out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water**” (John 7:39). It is this outflow that is the subject of Paul’s comments.

IN WORD AND DEED

“ . . . in word and deed . . . ” Here are the two great pillars of Gospel communication: word and deed, i.e., what is said and what is done. Again, men tend to emphasize one of these to the exclusion of the other. The Pharisees said, but did not “do” (Matt 23:3). Jesus spoke of those who said the right thing but “do not the things that I say” (Lk 6:46).

It is said of Jesus that He was “mighty in deed and word” (Lk 24:19). Paul declared there was a perfect harmony between what he said and what he did (2 Cor 10:11). All saints are admonished “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17). When words and deeds do not match, God is not in the matter!

MAKING THE GENTILES OBEDIENT

“ . . . to make the Gentiles obedient . . . ” Other versions read, “resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles,”^{NASB}
 “leading the Gentiles to obey,”^{NIV} and “to win obedience from the Gentiles.”^{NRSV}

There was an immediate objective in Paul’s words and deeds – a reason why he

spoke and why he worked. Here he relates that objective with his Apostleship, which was his chief reason for living (Phil 1:23-24). If men gave heed to what Paul said and did, they would become “obedient” to the Gospel! That was his personal objective, and that is what the message he declared was calculated to do.

There are messages that, when they are embraced, do not produce such results. Churches are filled with people who have embraced a message, yet have not become obedient. The message they have espoused is more of a church position or creed than it is Gospel. The danger of such a message is seen in the fact that all who “obey not the Gospel” will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire, being “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory

answers to all of their earthly challenges and difficulties. He sought to “make the Gentiles obedient” in what he said, and what he did. That is, indeed, a fitting and noble thing to do!

MIGHTY SIGNS AND WONDERS

“ . . . in mighty signs and wonders . . . ” Other versions read, “Through mighty signs and wonders,”^{KJV} “by the power of signs and miracles.”^{NIV} Paul had been given unique insights from the Lord, elsewhere called “the abundance of the revelations” (2 Cor 12:7). He was shown things that were hidden from former ages, not being made known to men “as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:2-5). This revelation was so lofty and extensive that even Peter declared, “our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given

. God has given some to see more than others, as He did Paul. He was an extraordinary messenger, who had no peers. As John the Baptist stood taller than all generations before him, so Paul stood taller in the matter of receiving revelations from God.

of His power” (2 Thess 1:8-9).

Whatever one may think of obedience, the Gospel of Christ is calculated to produce it. The Holy Spirit empowers men to do it (1 Pet 1:2), and Jesus is the “Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb 5:9).

Primarily, this is speaking of “the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26), for the Gospel demands that we believe it. **Where there is no faith, nothing else counts. Where faith is found, it moves one into the mainstream of the will of God.** No one who believes the Gospel will balk at the commandments of the Lord.

Thus Paul’s labors were calculated to bring men into accord with God. He did not speak to entertain men. Nor, indeed, were his words calculated to provide

unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood” (2 Pet 3:15-16).

Do not think for one moment that all messengers from God are on equal footing, or all see the same things. God has given some to see more than others, as He did Paul. He was an extraordinary messenger, who had no peers. As John the Baptist stood taller than all generations before him, so Paul stood taller in the matter of receiving revelations from God.

It was this very circumstance that produced the “mighty signs and wonder” that accompanied Paul’s ministry. An extraordinary message and messenger was accompanied with extraordinary displays of Divine power. Mediocre people and messages need no support from God.

Even so, the Holy Spirit is modest in

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providing a record of the “mighty signs and wonders” wrought through Paul. Here are the ones that are recorded.

- ‘ **Acts 13:8-11.** When opposed by Elymas the sorcerer, Paul struck him blind.
- ‘ **Acts 14:8-10.** A certain man from Lystra, impotent in his feet, and crippled from his mother’s womb, was healed by Paul, who perceived he had faith to be healed.
- ‘ **Acts 15:12.** Miracles and wonders were wrought by Barnabas and Paul among the Gentiles.
- ‘ **Acts 16:18.** He drove a demon out of woman who had a spirit of divination.

- ‘ **Acts 14:8-10** – “And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men” (v 11).
- ‘ **Acts 15:12** – “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God” (v 19).
- ‘ **Acts 16:18** – “And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (vs 33-34).

faith among professed believers. It may also be due to the fact that they are not preaching a Gospel God can bless. It seems to me to be a better course to zealously seek to be aligned with the Living God, preaching His Gospel, and seeking His will. If, in the course of such activities, the Lord sees fit to confirm His Word, and buttress our confidence, by stretching forth His hand in miraculous ways, we will be better able to receive it.

Too, if we have not been called to an unusual work, we should not expect it to be supported by unusual signs. It is time for men to cease trying to develop a theological position on miracles, and set themselves to say and do something worthy of the blessing of the Lord. If we learn anything from Scripture, it is that such signs and wonders are not to be taken for granted.

A Case in Point

A salient comment is made in the fourteenth chapter of Acts regarding this observation. The occasion was the preaching of the Gospel in Conium. “Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and **granted** signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” The whole city was divided over this situation, “and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles” (Acts 14:3-4). Signs and wonders have never occurred automatically. Throughout history, with the exception of the earthly ministry of Jesus, they have been sporadic, with no specific pattern of kind or time. They have been “granted.” While it is in order to seek such grants (Acts 4:29-30), the burden of our attention must be placed on declaring the Gospel in order to make men obedient.

BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

“ . . . by the power of the Spirit of God . . . ” This is a further explanation of the effectiveness of Paul’s words and deeds. First, they were supported by “mighty signs and wonders.” Second, they were done in “the power of the Spirit of God.” The Holy Spirit revealed the message to Paul (Eph 3:5). He provided the gifts and understanding through which the insightful proclamation was made (1 Cor 2:13). Both the message and the ability to proclaim it came from God.

It seems to me to be a better course to zealously seek to be aligned with the Living God, preaching His Gospel, and seeking His will.

- ‘ **Acts 19:11-12.** God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, causing diseases to be healed and evil spirits to leave through “hankerchiefs and aprons” sent from his body.
- ‘ **Acts 28:8.** Publius, the chief man from the barbarous island of Melita, was healed by Paul of a bloody flux.
- ‘ **Acts 28:9.** Others from the island of Melita were also healed by Paul.
- ‘ **Acts 20:9-12.** Paul raised Eutychus from the dead, after he had fallen from a third story window.
- ‘ **Acts 28:5-6.** After being bitten by a deadly viper, Paul shook the snake off in a fire, not being harmed at all.

Paul specifically related these things to his Apostleship. “Truly **the signs of an Apostle** were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:12). Our text declares such things were done to “make the Gentiles obedient.” Is this what occurred in the incidents listed above. What were the results of the mighty deeds wrought through the hands of Paul?

- ‘ **Acts 13:8-11** – “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord” (v 12).

- ‘ **Acts 19:11-12** – “And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” (vs 18-19).
- ‘ **Acts 28:5-9** – “Who also honored us with many honors” (v 10).
- ‘ **Acts 20:9-12** – This miracle was wrought among the brethren, who, as a result, “were not a little comforted” (v 12).

The point to be seen here is that the affects of “mighty signs and wonders” also testify to their origin. Paul confesses that their purpose was to “make the Gentiles obedient.” They also harmonized perfectly with the message that he brought.

Religious Controversy

Unfortunately, believers have haggled over the possibility of “mighty signs and wonders,” battling one another over the position that is taken on them. But only a fool will affirm that such workings are common among any body of religious people. In nearly all cases, they are unusual, and honest people know it. This may be largely owing to the lack of

When Jesus returned from His forty-day temptation in the wilderness, He “returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Lk 4:14). He was thus enabled to fulfill His commission from the Father. This is precisely what Paul is affirming: that He was enabled by the Holy Spirit to fulfill his commission. The work he was given to do was staggering. He was sent to the Gentiles “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (acts 26:18). **What mortal is adequate for such an assignment?** All of these things are normally credited to Deity – never to men. Yet, the Holy Spirit empowered Paul to do these things, making him effective in the work Jesus had assigned to him.

The Holy Spirit will do no less for you. You too have a role to play in the body of Christ – an assigned role. Spiritual ministries are not *up for grabs*, as some imagine. There are delegated abilities that are the domain in which we are to operate. We are, as Peter said, to “minister as of the ability which God giveth” (1 Pet 4:11). The Holy Spirit is active in such a ministry.

FROM JERUSALEM TO ILLYRICUM



“ . . . so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum . . . ”The extent of Paul’s travels would be considered significant in any age, including our own. Although he first began to preach in Damascus (Acts 9:22), he mentions Jerusalem, because it was the hub from which the Gospel spread: “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). Barnabas brought

Paul from Damascus to Jerusalem, where he was “with them coming in and going

indeed, did he subject the people to a mere introduction of the Gospel of Christ,

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out at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:27).

Illyricum was between 1,500 and 2,000 miles from Jerusalem, depending on the mode of travel. It was not as though Paul preached in Jerusalem, and then made a quantum leap to Illyricum where he also preached the Gospel. There were countries and regions in between to which he preached the Gospel: Greece, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Galatia, Phrygia, Asia, Italy, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Italy. Countless cities were exposed to the preaching of the Apostle to the Gentiles. These included Tyre, Damascus, Cyrus, Pathos, Salamis, Selucia, Antioch, Derby, Lystra, Iconium, Perga, Attalia, Ephesus, the Isle of Crete, Troas, Corinth, Athens, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Rome. All of these were along the way “from Jerusalem to Illyricum.”

By saying “from Jerusalem to Illyricum,” it is as though Paul said, “I did not run from Jerusalem to Illyricum, but preached in all the countries and cities in between them.” It is obvious that Paul took his commission seriously. He embraced his stewardship with godly zeal, focus, and affection. He is a noble example of spending and being spent for the work of the Lord (2 Cor 12:15).

FULLY PREACHED THE GOSPEL

“ . . . I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” Paul did not pass through these countries and cities giving an occasional personal testimony. Neither,

setting in motion a followup program for the completion of a Gospel course of study. Rather, he “fully preached,” or proclaimed, the Gospel of Christ.

Some people boast of a “full Gospel.” Paul “fully preached” the Gospel, which of itself is complete, and covers both Divine intent and human need. In another place Paul declared this manner of preaching. “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Again, he confessed, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). **A message as grand as the Gospel deserves to be proclaimed in its entirety.** Through it, the love of God is revealed (1 John 3:16), a righteousness from God (Rom 1:17), and the wrath of God against all unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). It is the Gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24), of the Kingdom of God (Matt 4:23), and of a peace that has been between God and man (Eph 6:15). It is the good news of “Jesus Christ,” His Person and His marvelous accomplishments (Mark 1:1). This is “the Gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13), and the good news of the “blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11). It proclaims the cursing of Jesus in order to the deliverance of men (Gal 3:13), and that God made Jesus to be sin in order that He might make us the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21). This Gospel announces the consecration of a new and living way that leads to God (Heb 10:20), an Intercessor that ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25), and an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us (1 Pet 1:4). He declares that, because of Jesus, God can make us stand (Rom 14:4),

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and keep us from falling (Jude 24). The Gospel announces the destruction of Satan (Heb 2:14), the spoiling of principalities and powers (Col 2:15), and the end of the Law for righteousness (Rom 10:4). What a marvelous Gospel we have!

The Gospel declares God has given us eternal life in His Son (1 John 5:11). It affirms that the Holy Spirit is given to those in Christ, and will assist them in

subduing the flesh (Rom 8:13), enable to abound in hope (Rom 15:13), and offer intercessions for them when they do not know what to pray for as they ought (Rom 8:26-27). The Gospel declares that in Christ there is *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 14:17). There is *“no condemnation”* (Rom 8:1), but men are *“made accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6).

Paul *“fully preached”* the Gospel, so that none of its great provisions were

hidden, or could not be grasped by faith. Those who received His message would be left with a keen sense of the goodness of God, and the sinfulness of sin. Wherever there was a listening ear, there was no disappointment in the hearts of those who heard Paul preach the Gospel of Christ. Issues were made clear, and Divine provisions were put within their reach. Those who believed his report received a lively sense of Divine adequacy, and were motivated to take hold of it quickly.

I MADE IT MY AIM

“²⁰ And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation,²¹ but as it is written: ‘To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.’” Here Paul shares something intensely personal – something he did not always divulge. He had an ambition that was not commanded, yet contributed to the effectiveness of what he was told to do. There is a certain freedom

“And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel . . .” Other versions read, *“I strived to preach the gospel,”^{KJV}*, *“I aspired to preach the gospel,”^{NASB}* *“It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel,”^{NIV}* and *“it has been my rule to preach the gospel.”^{NJB}* When one is called to preach the Gospel, he must set about to think how he will do it. John the Baptist preached to Jews, where *“the people were in expectation”* of the coming Messiah (Lk 3:15). But whether it was John, Stephen, Philip, or Apollos, each of them set their

when this condition exists, but one must grow out of it to be an effective laborer for the Lord. Neither the human spirit nor the gifts of God are intended to be held in a state of indecision or a lack of focus.

NOT WHERE CHRIST WAS NAMED

“ . . . not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation . . . ” This was not an inviolable law by which Paul operated. He was determined to preach the Gospel in Rome, where a well established congregation existed (Rom 1:15). However, as a rule, he aimed at preaching the Gospel among those who had never heard it before.

He shared this same objective with the Corinthians, even explaining it in more detail. *“We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory”^{NIV}* (2 Cor 10:14-16).

In a meeting with the other Apostles, a pact was struck between them that Peter and the others would preach to the Jews, while Paul would major on preaching to the untaught Gentiles. This was agreed upon because they perceived the grace that had been given Paul – grace that particularly suited him for the work.

Many would-be servants of the Lord flounder about in indecision, not sure of what they are to do, or how they are to do it. There may very well be a period of time when this condition exists, but one must grow out of it to be an effective laborer for the Lord.

involved in serving Christ. It is not the sort of liberty that gives license to the flesh, but allows the *“workman”* to work in refreshing co-partnership with the Lord. There is room for expanded thought, creativity, and originality – all the while protecting the content and effectiveness of the Gospel of Christ. Laboring together with God tends to expand and enhance human capabilities, not stifle them.

I MADE IT MY AIM

minds to do what they were called to do. If it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful (1 Cor 4:2), then those who preach and teach must pay attention to what they do. They should have an aim, a purpose, an aspiration that pertains to their work.

Many would-be servants of the Lord flounder about in indecision, not sure of what they are to do, or how they are to do it. There may very well be a period of time

“But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision”
NKJV (Gal 2:7-9).

There is certainly nothing wrong with kindred spirits working together to preach the Gospel in the most effective manner. Some have embraced a view of preaching and teaching that leaves everything up to chance, with no personal perception or planning. While the human mind must not be allowed the place of prominence, it is to be heartily devoted to the work of the Lord, charged with alertness and perception.

Paul’s determination not to build upon another man’s foundation was noble. It was not prompted by a disdain for other Kingdom laborers, or a disrespect for their accomplishments. However, such efforts are often attended by having to deal with doctrinal corruptions, misapprehensions, and erroneous views of the Kingdom – all of which tend to consume a lot of time. Much of the Epistles is devoted to correcting flawed doctrine and living. Some have imagined that these corrections and reproofs are the Gospel. They are not. Rather, they are necessitated by inaccurate views of the Gospel.

NEW SEEING AND UNDERSTANDING

“ . . . but as it is written: ‘To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.’” Paul had an insatiable appetite for the Lord to be honored and glorified. Here, for example, he refers to a promise given through Isaiah. *“So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: **for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider**”* (Isa 52:15). Isaiah also alluded to this in the sixty-fifth chapter of his prophecy. *“I am*

*sought of them that asked not for me; **I am found of them that sought me not**: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name”* (Isa 65:1).

Here is a work that brings great glory to God: when a people who had not been cultured to believe the Gospel heartily embrace it. Here is a

Here is a man who set himself to fulfill one of the great prophecies of Scripture. He knew that God is able to save with “few” as well as “many” (1 Sam 14:6). Like Nehemiah, he set out to do a gigantic work with but few human resources (Neh 2:12-15). Of course, God has always sought for such a man.

man who set himself to fulfill one of the great prophecies of Scripture. He knew that God is able to save with “few” as well as “many” (1 Sam 14:6). Like Nehemiah, he set out to do a gigantic work with but few human resources (Neh 2:12-15). Of course, God has always sought for such a man. His eyes continually range too and fro upon the face of the whole earth *“to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him”* (2 Chron 16:9).

The thing to see here is that Paul realized the magnitude of the work to which he had been called. He did not pull his commission down into the plains of human wisdom, but took it and soared into the mountain peaks of Divine possibilities.

Until Christ had risen from the dead and was enthroned *“on the right hand of the Majesty on high”* (Heb 1:3), God *“suffered all nations to walk in their own ways”* (Acts 14:16). They were excluded from *“the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.”* The *“fathers”* did not belong to them, and the Christ did not come from them (Rom 9:4-5). Yet, upon hearing the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, they *“turned to God*

from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess 1:9-10).

The Gospel was announced to them who did not see, and they saw! A Gospel was delivered to those with no understanding, and they understood. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Psa 118:23)!

Ponder several such incidents that are revealed in Scripture.

- ‘ Upon hearing the Gospel from Philip the evangelist, the whole city of Samaria believed (Acts 8:5-8). Prior to this, Jesus passed through Samaria, but did not preach there, save to a lone woman at the well of Jacob (Lk 17:11; John 4:4-9). They were not cultured to believe, yet they did!
- ‘ An Ethiopian eunuch with no understanding of Scripture, comprehended it the very first time it was expounded to him (Acts 8:27-29).
- ‘ Certain Grecians heard men of Cyprus and Cyrene *“preaching the Lord Jesus.”* It is written, *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord”* (Acts 11:20-21).
- ‘ When coming into Pathos, Paul and Barnabas encountered a false Jewish false prophet who sought to interfere with the deputy of the country hearing the word of the Lord. He sought to turn the deputy away from the faith, and Paul struck him blind. After hearing the good news but once, *“Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord”* (Acts 13:12).

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' In Antioch of Pisidia, after a group of Jews had forthrightly rejected the Gospel, a group of Gentiles were glad to hear the Word of the Lord, glorified it, and believed (Acts 13:48).
' In Iconium, a great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed upon hearing the Gospel for the first time (Acts 14:1).

Greeks, and many prominent women believed (Acts 17:4,12).
' In the philosophical citadel of Athens, "certain . . . believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them," upon first hearing the Gospel (Acts 17:34).

Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver" (Acts 18:18-19).

Truly, the Lord is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph 3:20). Paul believed this, and applied it to his own Apostleship to the nations of the world. He was able to associate the promises of God with the work to which Jesus had called him. That is no small accomplishment! Yet, it is something that can be experienced by everyone who works together with God.

Those who work with the Lord must be versatile enough to make determinations, all the while remaining sensitive to adjust them to the revealed will of God when required. Those who rely wholly upon human strategies will invariably drift from the promises of God.

Those who work with the Lord must be versatile enough to make determinations, all the while remaining sensitive to adjust them to the revealed will of God when required. Those who rely wholly upon human strategies will invariably drift from the promises of God. But those who are willing to fasten upon some promise of God, and labor to see it fulfilled to the glory of God, will not be ashamed or disappointed. In your own measure, and according to your faith, you may participate in such a blessing. Set your heart on doing so!

' Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira believed and obeyed the Gospel when she first heard it (Acts 16:14-15).
' A Philippian jailor, upon his initial hearing of the Gospel, "believed with all of his house" (Acts 16:31-34).
' In Thessalonica, when they first heard the Gospel, a great multitude of devout

' When first exposed to the Gospel, many Corinthians "hearing believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8).
' In Ephesus, where cultist activity flourished, fear fell upon those who heard the Gospel. The name of Jesus was magnified among them, and "many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds.

CONCLUSION

In Christ Jesus, it is not only possible to do a great and extensive work, it is possible to do it well. But it all depends on one's perception of his own calling, and reliance upon the grace and power of God. For those who labor in preaching and teaching, or "the word and the doctrine" (1 Tim 5:17), it is necessary to have some perception of the people to whom they minister. The recognition of Kingdom abilities in those whom we serve is essential to sound and profitable exhortation. Also, when God has done a work in someone, it is in order for us to recognize it and devote ourselves to encouraging its prominence in the people. Many a Divinely initiated work would do better if only the people were encouraged, their bruises bound up, and their smoking flax fanned into a flame.

This is not some kind of wishful thinking or philosophical prattling. Paul

His servants, "Well done, good and faithful servant . . ." (Matt 25:21). When

He has shared the nature of his ministry, and how he has sought to fulfill it. He was able to do this because the brethren in Rome were kindred spirits. Their faith in Christ and love for the brethren enabled Paul to speak more profitably to them.

has exemplified this manner in our text. We should never be ashamed of acknowledging the work of God in others, or hesitant to affirm we see it, and give thanks for it. Even the Lord will say to

the Philippians were thoughtful of Paul, ministering to his need, He said, "ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction" (Phil 4:14). Let us seek to culture such a spirit. It will do our

brethren good, and bring glory to God.

There is something else to be seen in this text. When we perceive our role in the body of Christ, and are bold enough to speak about it, we should use that role to bring some benefit to the people to whom we speak. Paul spoke of his Apostleship, and of the great things the Lord had done through him. But he did not leave it at that. He used his ministry to bring advantage strength, and comfort to the saints in Rome. It is good that we seek to

do the same, profiting our brethren by our mutual faith. **Those with whom we company should personally benefit from our gifts and ministries.**

You see how personal Paul has been with the brethren in Rome – and with us. He has shared the nature of his ministry, and how he has sought to fulfill it. He was able to do this because the brethren in Rome were kindred spirits. Their faith in Christ and love for the brethren enabled Paul to speak more profitably to them.

I have made mention of this before, but feel constrained to do it again. **When we put our hearts and minds into the work of the Lord, strengthening our faith, and advancing in virtue and hope, we will be able to receive much more from godly ministers.** Not only will they be inclined to give us more of the bread they themselves have tasted, our godly attitude and demeanor will prove to be a great encouragement to them. The value of harmonious and kindred spirits cannot be overstated.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 11/16/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 22-33 of the fifteenth chapter. The theme will be, **“PLANNING TO COME TO ROME.”** Faith does not exclude the making of godly plans, as this text will affirm. Contrary to simplistic thought, the person who walks with God purposefully plans to carry out his stewardship to the glory of God. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Jonathan (Jonstalk@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)
Adah/Jason Hutchcraft (hutchcraftj@esr.edu)

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

**WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>
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