

November 14, 2021 - David Baumgartner

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Preacher: David Baumgartner

[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. All right. God is good.

Isn't he? And all the time? He is. Amen. If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Romans chapter 15. We'll be picking it up in verses 14 to 21 today.

We're actually coming to the end of this book. Last week we finished pretty much the main body of this letter. And really all that's left would be some concluding remarks from Paul.

So I'd say today is going to be a pretty easy message. Actually, our passage this morning is a very touching passage. I see two main points that Paul has.

First of all, Paul has some very kind words. To say to these believers in Rome. I mean, I can imagine them getting this letter and saying, Finally, this guy's got some nice stuff to talk to us about.

[1 : 06] The second thing, though, which I think is the main focus today, Is how did Paul see himself? In terms of his role in God's overall plan.

And so this morning, we can gain some insight Into Paul's personal philosophy of ministry. Has anybody ever heard that term before? It's actually a pretty popular term talked about in other churches.

But you might ask, what is a personal philosophy of ministry? Basically, it's a blueprint for what God wants you to do and how to do it.

It's guided by scripture and it's guided by a thoughtful examination of your life. It's shaped by your own, what we'd call divine design.

And that would be looking at your giftedness, your spiritual gifts, Your abilities, your experiences, whether they're good or bad. Your burdens. In other words, what moves you?

[2 : 06] You know, maybe it's just some of the poverty that we see in this world. Maybe that moves you. Maybe injustice moves you. And there may be some particular Bible verse that maybe you have claimed, Boy, this one is about my life.

This one really speaks for me. So that's a personal philosophy of ministry. And the benefits is that it provides direction in a person's life. Knowing, what does God want me to do?

What does he have for me to do? How does he want me to serve him? And so I'd like to be looking at this some more in the coming weeks. But, you know, this is a personal reflection of a person's life.

And by the way, there may be a collective philosophy of ministry as far as how a church looks at itself and looks at its ministry. But anyway, I'd like to focus on what we can learn from Paul this morning about ministry.

The emphasis is not for us to be like Paul. Okay? You know, and here's simply why.

[3 : 18] God had something special for Paul. But you and I are not Paul from Tarsus. No. You and I are not him. God has something special for you and I too.

So let's go ahead and pray. And let's dive in here to Romans 15. We'll be picking it up again at verse 14. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time that we have together to study your word, to fellowship, to be encouraged, and to, Lord, just to see what you have for us.

We are so grateful for the salvation that you have, by grace, provided each one of us, Lord, through faith in Christ Jesus. But, Lord, we know that you have a plan.

And it's our desire to know how you would use us. And so, Lord, we seek that through the ministry of your word and the encouragement through your Holy Spirit that we would be able to see what you have for us.

We thank you for all of what you're doing and what you're going to do. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. About three months ago, my wife and I signed up to something called Pure Flix.

[4 : 27] Anybody heard of that? Yeah, it's a competitor to Netflix. And with Pure Flix, you get basically Christian movies. And either that or they're very moral stories.

They're very good. I think among the first movies that we saw was this story. It's obviously a make-believe story about the Apostle Paul.

He gets teleported into the present time. And, you know, it's just kind of interesting, you know, how they see him and, you know, how he sees us.

And, of course, he's a brilliant guy, so he learns English really quickly. And so they have him, you know, they present, you know, what Paul is all about today.

I think they got it somewhat wrong. They talked about him being, looking at spiritual unity. That's all his concern was, was about unifying all the churches.

[5 : 27] And, boy, that's going to be a tough job. So, but anyway, I think it's more of like what Jacob was talking about. You know, how did Paul start churches?

How did he do it? How did he, once he started a church, how did he build it? And so that's what I really see as far as Paul's heart, where it was.

If you look with me in the verse 14, let's begin there. He says, Concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness.

Boy, what a great way to start a letter. You know, this portion here. Isn't it good to commend other people, especially when you know it's true?

Coming from the Apostle Paul. I don't think that we hear enough good things. Amen? We don't.

Notice here he mentions three qualities concerning these believers in Rome.

[6 : 25] Not only does he remind them of their brotherhood with each other, but they also, he says, you're full of goodness. Did you see that? Full of goodness.

What does that mean? Well, we know from the use of the word in other places, that's talking about having a positive moral quality. You may think of it as someone who is, that has an interest in the welfare of others.

Goodness is one of the, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And it's evidence that a believer is cooperating with what God wants for that person. So what a great thing to have here.

But not only that, he says also in verse 14, they're filled with knowledge. Notice, all knowledge. Boy, what a thing to say regarding these people.

I don't think that we should think of this in an absolute sense. Rather, that they have the full picture of what God wants for them. We might even say that they're biblically informed.

[7 : 30] Now, of course, they didn't have all the writings of Paul at that time and other apostles. But certainly, they had the Old Testament and they would have known quite a lot. Some manuscripts, in the Greek manuscripts, it actually says, filled with the knowledge.

So that's kind of an interesting thing. And that may be referring to some specific knowledge. Maybe the whole counsel of God. Either way, wouldn't you say that's a good thing to possess?

Written from Paul. But even something better. Not only did they have these qualities of goodness and knowledge, they were able to put them to use.

Look with me, verse 14. He says, they're able also to admonish one another. That word there, nuthateo, that means to warn or to instruct.

Maybe you have heard of nuthetic counseling. Has anybody ever heard that term? This is referring to a special type of Christian counselors that are out there.

[8 : 38] There's the National Association of Nuthetic Counselors. They actually changed their name a few years ago to the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors.

And here's how they define nuthetic counseling. Listen to this. Lovingly confronting people out of a deep concern in order to help them make changes that God requires in their lives.

The founder of nuthetic counsel is considered to be a guy named Jay Adams. And by the way, he died exactly two years ago today.

He's written over a hundred books, they say. But here's the thing. Jay Adams had many critics. And here's why. It's mostly from worldly psychologists.

And they said that the basis of his counseling is this. You can't really help a person unless he or she is willing to deal with their sin.

[9 : 37] Well, who in the world likes that word sin? Yeah, but I tell you what, there's a lot to it there. Nuthetic, therefore, it means to warn.

I think the main point here, the apostle is commending this church because they're able to do that very thing. They're able to instruct one another, to warn one another, and to help each other informally and in ways toward counseling.

This is something that all believers ought to be able to do. Wouldn't you agree? To help one another? I think churches today, there's very little of that going on.

I think churches today, they're very good or very big and good works, but perhaps weak in instruction. I'm talking about biblical instruction. Well, in Rome, they're able to do that.

They're able to encourage one another out of scriptures. Even to warn one another. And that's because they possessed goodness and knowledge.

[10:44] So these three things together, I believe Paul's characterizing here what a healthy, functioning church ought to look like anywhere.

A healthy church. Notice here he goes on, verse 15. But, uh-oh, here's a but here. I have written very boldly to you on some points.

Boy, we've been going through Romans and I'd agree with that, wouldn't you? He has. Just consider Paul's boldness with some of these here. Back in Romans chapter 2, verse 1.

Therefore, you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment. Uh-oh, raise your hands. Who does that? Yeah. For in that you judge one another, you condemn yourself.

For you who judge practice the same things. Uh-oh. That's a pretty bold thing. How about chapter 6? Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies that it should obey its lusts.

[11:44] Wow. Do not go on presenting members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. How about chapter 11? Do not be arrogant toward the branches.

Okay, you remember what he was talking about there, the fellow Jews who are believers.

Remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. How about this one in chapter 12?

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Think about yourself with sober judgment. Chapter 13. Let us behave properly as in the day, not carousing in drunkenness and sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife, not in jealousy.

Yeah, I would say he has some bold things to say to them and to us as well. And especially when considering that as far as we know, Paul has never been to Rome or at least to even visit this church.

Some of the believers in Rome who got this letter, they may ask this question, who does this guy think he is? You know, from where does he get the authority to speak to us this way?

[12:55] I mean, we're from the imperial city. Who is this guy? Look with verse 15. He says this, I've written boldly to you and here's why.

So as to remind you again because of the grace that was given to me from God, verse 16, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.

That section there, that brings me to the main, what I think is the main theme of this passage. How did Paul view his ministry? I think that Paul wanted the believers in Rome to understand how did he see himself?

Now you may ask, well, when he says remind you again, did he say something like that before?

Actually, he did. He hinted at it all the way back in chapter 1.

You don't have to, I'll just read it here. Paul, the bondservant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, and then he says, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles for his name's sake.

[14:08] So Paul did hint at that, but he wants them to see how did God shape his life? How did God use him? And I actually see, I see four ways that he talks about here.

Notice first, Paul saw himself as an apostle. Notice here, it starts with grace. Verse 15, he says, because of the grace that was given to me from God, grace placed Paul in the office of apostleship. Now, we know that he was not among the original 12, was he? No, he wasn't. In fact, he was a persecutor of the church. And I believe at that time, Paul would have known very little about grace. After all, what was he? Not only a persecutor, he was a Pharisee. Yeah, even that word itself means to be separated. And what were the Pharisees doing?

They're trying to earn God's support and approval through all the meticulous laws and stuff that they were trying to keep. Paul didn't earn his ministry.

[15 : 25] He didn't buy it. He didn't bully his way into it. No, but God did it. It was out of grace. What a great thing here to be reminded.

Paul would write in his first letter to the Corinthians, let me just read it to you, chapter 15. He says, I'm the least of the apostles who am not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church. But listen to this. But by the grace of God, I am what I am. Can we say that today? I am what I am because of God's grace.

And his grace toward me, he says, did not prove vain, but I labored even more than all of them. Yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

So what a way to start here, this passage. Grace is the key. Everything in our lives flows from grace, doesn't it? It's a starting point.

[16 : 22] It's where it starts. I think it's good to remember that grace was given to us in whatever we're doing. Do you remember what your life was like before Christ came into your life?

Do you remember what it was? I tell you what, I came into Christ in my early 20s. And you consider the things that I did, which I won't rehearse today, but I ought to be dead.

But Christ was full of grace. If you're a believer and you are struggling in some area, you are still infinitely better off than you were before Christ came into your life.

Those are some truth, friends. So first, Paul, he was an apostle. Secondly, look with me in verse 16. Paul himself saw, Paul saw himself as a minister.

Look with me. Ministering as a priest, the gospel of God. Paul here talks about how he's a minister, ministering as a priest.

[17 : 31] Now, these two words here, they're different words, but they both refer to a religious sense as a priest. You may think of Zechariah, John the Baptist's father.

In Luke 1, we read of him performing what is called his priestly service in the temple. And, you know, doing things pertaining to God. But for Paul, here's kind of a twist.

Instead of animals and whatever, incense and so on, Paul is offering up Gentiles. Look with me here. Verse 16. That my offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Well, that might be kind of an odd choice of words, isn't it? That he's offering up Gentiles. I think he might be misunderstood today. But, no.

I think he's talking here about his blood, sweat, and tears in terms of his ministry. Notice two things here about this ministry here. Notice his focus.

[18 : 41] It's to the Gentiles. This is how Paul is known today. He's the apostle to the Gentiles. He says this himself in Romans 11, in his letter to Timothy, chapter 2, verse 7.

Don't you know him as Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles? Yeah. Did you know, initially, Paul went to the synagogues to meet with his fellow Jews?

But there was a turning point in his ministry. And that happened in Corinth. It's recorded in Acts 18. I'll just read it to you. It says, when they, that's the Jews in Corinth, resisted and blasphemed him, Paul shook his garments and said to them, your blood be upon your own heads.

I am clean. From now on, I shall go to the Gentiles. I'm sure Paul didn't like that, being rejected. But I believe that he saw this rejection as this is what comes with the territory.

They rejected Jesus, right? And so they're going to reject me. And so Paul just gives it to the Lord. What a great example that is.

[19 : 57] We have, even in our family still, you know, just rejection. We want to meet with them and they won't. It's terrible. I've heard that shared this morning at the Lord's Supper.

But Paul took it to the Lord. In fact, I would say it's Paul's honor to be rejected. Look with me, 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. For Paul, God gets all the credit. And I would say that for all of us as well, our privilege is to cooperate with the Lord.

And to, you know, as well as all the apostles did except for one. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he says, He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.

For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. So, the second thing to notice here, not only about the Gentiles, but notice, what's the goal of his ministry?

[21 : 07] Verse 18. Resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles. Wow. That's kind of interesting, isn't it?

What's he talking about? Well, Paul actually opened this letter with a very similar thing. If you look with me in chapter 1, verse 5, he says, Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his namesake.

In the Greek grammar language here, I think that this is what's called a genitive of source. In other words, it would read obedience that comes from faith.

You got that? Obedience which comes from faith. You see, Paul was not interested in only just a person's conversion.

No, he's interested in their sanctification which comes after faith. And this is important. He not only begins his letter that way, Paul will end his letter this way in Romans 16.

[22 : 18] If you want to look with me in chapter 16, verse 26, he says, But now it is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all nations, leading to obedience of faith.

So that's Paul's goal here. Gentiles sanctification after coming to faith. That's how you build a church. That's maybe what will happen in Kenya.

That's what maybe will happen here still in these states. So Paul, he's the apostle, he's the minister. Thirdly, Paul saw himself as a preacher. But do you realize how many different words there are in the Greek language for preacher or preaching?

There's a bunch of them. Some of the words refer to the content of what's being preached. Other words refer to the manner in which it's being preached.

And I tell you what, with Paul, you see all of them. All of them apply to him. Some of them emphasize the content, the good news. Some of them would talk about the speaker as a herald.

[23 : 32] Like, for instance, a guy coming to St. Louis to announce that the king is coming. Or maybe our president. Some of the words talk about preaching in a bold manner.

That applies to Paul. In Acts chapter 9, we read that when Barnabas first brought Paul to the rest of the apostles, he said of them, and this is in Acts 9, he described to them how Paul had seen the Lord, how he had talked to the Lord, and how at Damascus, he boldly spoke out in the name of Jesus.

So Paul is a bold speaker. I don't think any of us ought to be surprised that Paul was a preacher. Would we? No.

Preaching has been described as a mild mannered man standing up before mild mannered people, exhorting them to be more mild mannered.

You agree with that? No, not Paul. No, Paul comforted those who were disturbed and he disturbed those who were comforted.

[24 : 44] Notice in verse 18 how Paul qualifies his preaching. Notice with me, three distinctions here. First of all, in verse 18, by word.

We know that Paul preached what the Lord showed him. This is referring to the content of what he said. Paul preached the truth. Secondly, in deed.

In word and deed. In other words, Paul lived according to what he said. And that's really important today. And that's because a person's moral integrity is on the line.

Paul was a person who lived by what he said. And then thirdly, notice, power. Verse 19, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit.

In Acts, we read about how God did numerous miracles through Paul. This was given, you know, to all the apostles. And also Paul.

[25 : 51] In fact, it was given to authenticate the messenger and their message. Paul would say, the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles.

You see, in Paul's day, perhaps as there are today, there were lots of Greek philosophers and schools of sophistry and itinerant teachers who would just, they'd come to town and they would show up and they would prey on people.

And here's a question, how would you know which one was true? Well, at this time, signs and wonders. In fact, it's God's way of saying, this guy is speaking for me.

He's got the truth. Now, someone may ask, well, why can't we do signs and miracles today?

Anybody have a good answer for that? I would not deny that miracles happen today, but personally, I believe that it's because we don't need any apostles anymore.

We have the original ones and we have their writings that are available to us. The other thing you see here, Paul preached the gospel and you may ask, what's the result of his gospel?

[27 : 14] Well, look around the room. Look at all the people here. Mostly, I'd say, descendants from Europe, perhaps some from Africa. Verse 19, he says, so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illaricum, I have fully preached the gospel.

We know the book of Acts gives us that account. And his area actually measured, if you look at from Jerusalem to Illaricum, that's some 14,000 miles.

Illaricum is modern-day Albania, the former Yugoslavia. Notice he says, I fully preached the gospel. What does he mean? He may be referring to the whole counsel of God, but I think it's more that he fully preached in the areas that he was at.

In other words, he's fully completed giving out the message, and now it's time to move on, as we'll see the next time we look at Paul's letter here. He's going to talk about Spain and so on.

So Paul's the apostle, minister, preacher. Lastly, he saw himself as a pioneer. Look with me, verse 12. I'm sorry, verse 20. And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation.

[28 : 42] Apparently, Paul's strategy was to plant churches in key cities, and from there, all of his ministry partners could fan out and evangelize these smaller towns.

I want to ask you this question, is it wrong to build on another person's foundation? Is it wrong? No, I don't think it is, or else we wouldn't be here today.

It's not a question of right or wrong. It's about God's plan for each one of us. This is what God had Paul doing.

And, you know, the question we may ask, what is God doing with each one of us? What's he doing with you? What's he doing with me? John would say, this is in John, Jesus would say, for in this case, the saying is true, one sows and another reaps.

I sent you to reap for that which you have not labored. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor. See, some are called to lay a foundation, but there's others that are called to build upon it.

[30 : 00] Paul goes on here, this is the last verse for today, regarding his personal, and I think that this might be his personal ministry verse. Verse, he says in verse 21, as it is written, they who had no news of him, he's talking about Jesus here, shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.

What an interesting thing to say. This verse is actually from Isaiah 52, verse 15. It's a messianic prophecy about the servant of the Lord.

And who is that? Jesus. And yet Paul is like taking this on himself, that it refers to him. I think that Paul sees himself as having part in fulfilling God's plan for the world.

And you think about it, wherever he went, there was widespread despair, people were empty, people were longing for something, people were gripped by superstition and fear.

Does that sound like today? I think it does. So I end here with a really good question just to ask ourselves. Does my life and my witness impact others for Christ?

[31 : 23] Paul would say yes, he could. Personally, I think there's an end point when God's going to say, okay, the full number of Gentiles, they're in.

all of my sheep are accounted for. And at that point, the door of the ark, if you will, will close.

God wins. There you have it, friends. Paul was a marvelous instrument of the Lord. And if I can invite the musicians to come up as they do, have you ever considered how this guy who lived some 2,000 years ago has impacted your life?

Well, it was really the Lord Jesus, but he used this guy. There's not a person in this room who hasn't benefited in some way from Paul's ministry.

Paul, yet, Paul was a sinner. And I think it just goes to show you, to be used by God, you don't have to be sinless, but you need to be humble.

[32 : 30] We don't have to have a long list of abilities, but we do need to be willing. And notice, the biggest thing of all, it starts with grace.

Yeah, I think if Paul was teleported into our culture right now, what would he say? I'll tell you what he would first of all say, it starts with grace, truth, loving the Lord, finding your purpose, God's love.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for today, and we thank you for what this letter has been to us, Lord. And as we come to these finishing themes in this letter, we pray, Father, that we can apply

