

## **Romans (91)** **The priestly work of evangelism**

The Apostle Paul's greatest desire in his life and ministry was that God would be glorified through his apostolic ministry of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentile world. The realization of this desire would occur when and to the degree the Jewish and Gentile believers viewed themselves and one another as the one people of God of which God had purposed to save unto Himself by His grace through Jesus Christ. It was all important, therefore, that this church at Rome (as the other churches but perhaps most of all this church) see their fellowship with one another in Christ realized. Paul wrote in Romans 15:1-7 concerning this matter:

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup>Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. <sup>3</sup>For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." <sup>4</sup>For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup>May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

It would require the grace of God to enable this fellowship to be realized, but He was capable and willing to do so. For as we considered last Lord's Day, our God is the God of endurance and encouragement who instructs His people through the (Old Testament) Scriptures, giving them endurance and encouragement to live for Him and with one another.

Paul saw the Gentiles coming to faith and glorifying God along with Jewish believers in Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God's purpose in history prophesied by the prophets of Israel. Here is the portion of a quotation I provided two weeks ago when we introduced this passage:

Gentiles have been included so that they will praise God along with the Jews. Glorifying God and praising him are two different ways of expressing the same idea. Paul's passion for the Gentile mission, as we saw in 1:5, was motivated by the desire to bring glory to Jesus' name. The recurrence of that theme here, along with the emphasis on the fulfillment of God's saving promises in the Scriptures, demonstrates that 15:7-13 not only functions as the conclusion to 14:1-15:6 but also draws attention to the major theme (the glory and praise of God) of the entire letter.<sup>1</sup>

In order for Paul to demonstrate that the Jews and Gentiles being saved through the gospel unto the glory of God is the fulfillment of God's purposes in history, Paul cited the Hebrew Scriptures (our "Old Testament"). Perhaps in citing these Scripture verses Paul was hoping that God would impart endurance and encouragement to the church through the Scriptures. Paul quoted from throughout the Hebrew canon thereby showing that all Scripture looked toward the day when Israel would be joined by Gentiles in the worship of God as one people of God. We read in **verses 8 and 9**, "***For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.***" Paul was teaching that the New Testament church of Jesus Christ, which was comprised of Jewish and Gentile believers, is the Israel of God through

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1995), p. 704.

which God was fulfilling His promises to the patriarchs.<sup>2</sup> We read in Romans 15:9bff his citations from the Scriptures.

As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>10</sup>And again it is said,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>11</sup>And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,  
And let all the peoples extol him.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>12</sup>And again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse will come,  
Even He who arises to rule the Gentiles;  
In Him will the Gentiles hope.”<sup>6</sup>

The apostle concluded this series of Old Testament verses with a benediction in **Romans 15:13**, effectively concluding the flow of his argument of the entire epistle. This is the culmination, the last word that Paul wanted to press upon this church.

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

Paul desired that these people would be filled with hope. This hope is based upon the knowledge and assurance that they were the people of God through whom all the promises of God in history were being fulfilled. Paul probably saw this church at the seat of the Romans Empire as the realization of the expansion of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, that is, with the church of Jesus Christ existing and functioning in Rome, the restored Davidic Kingdom encompassed the entire world. The Kingdom of Jesus Christ has grown to include Gentile believers from every place. And when the fellowship of the church was realized between Jewish and Gentile believers in this church, Paul was suggesting to them that they would experience the blessing of God and more fully see the realization of the promises of God to them.

We now arrive to **Romans 15:14-21**, which is only a part of the larger last division of the Epistle that encompasses Romans 15:34 to the near end of the epistle at Romans 16:23. The theme of this larger section of the epistle is “The Extension of the God’s Righteousness through the Pauline Mission.” This is in accordance with the primary theme of the Epistle to the Romans which is “The Righteousness of God.” Paul has shown forth through this epistle the righteousness of God in His dealings with mankind in a number of ways. Here is a general outline of this theme:

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<sup>2</sup> This passage negates the doctrine of classical dispensationalism that teaches this church age is a “parenthesis” in the plan of God, that the church is distinct from Israel and a temporary work of God, until He returns to deal with the nation of Israel, His primary concern, at some point in the future prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> From 2 Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49

<sup>4</sup> From Deuteronomy 32:43

<sup>5</sup> From Psalm 117:1

<sup>6</sup> From Isaiah 11:10

- I. The Gospel as the Revelation of God's Righteousness (1:1-17)
- II. God's Righteousness in His Wrath against Sinners (1:18-3:20)
- III. The Saving Righteousness of God (3:21-4:25)
- IV. Hope as a Result of Righteousness by Faith (5:1-8:39)
- V. God's Righteousness to Israel and the Gentiles (9:1-11:36)
- VI. God's Righteousness in Everyday Life (12:3-13:14)
- VII. The Extension of God's Righteousness through the Pauline Mission (15:14-16:23)
- VIII. Final Summary of the Gospel of God's Righteousness (16:25-27)<sup>7</sup>

How are we to understand **Romans 15:14-21** within the larger section, "The Extension of God's Righteousness through the Pauline Mission" (15:14-16:23)? Here the apostle describes his own comprehension of his role as the apostle to the Gentiles. He has witnessed God at work through him to fulfill His purposes in history that the Gentiles far and wide have heard and believed the gospel through his apostolic ministry. Through Paul's successful mission to the Gentiles, God was using him to bring to pass His promises to Abraham. The kingdom would be world-wide, encompassing Gentiles from all over the world, therefore Paul had sought to plant churches where the Gentiles had never heard the gospel. Let us read this paragraph.

<sup>14</sup>I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. <sup>15</sup>But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup>to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. <sup>17</sup>In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. <sup>18</sup>For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience--by word and deed, <sup>19</sup>by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God--so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; <sup>20</sup>and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, <sup>21</sup>but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Paul first expressed confidence in the character and advancement of these Christians in the faith. **Verse 14** reads, "*I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.*" Why did Paul express this confidence respecting this church? Here is one possible explanation:

This was said to anticipate an objection, or it may be deemed a kind of concession, made with the view of pacifying the Romans; in case they thought themselves reproved by so many and so urgent admonitions, and thus unjustly treated. He then makes an excuse for having ventured to assume towards them the character of a teacher and of an exhorter; and he says, that he had done so, not *because* he had any doubt as to their wisdom, or kindness, or perseverance; but because he was constrained by his *office*. Thus he removed every suspicion of presumption, which especially shows itself when any one thrusts himself into an office which does not belong to him, or speaks of those things which are unsuitable to him. We see in this instance the singular modesty of this holy man, to whom nothing was more acceptable than to be thought of no account, provided the doctrine he preached retained its authority.

There was much pride in the Romans; the name even of their city made the lowest of the people proud; so that they could hardly bear a teacher of another nation, much less a barbarian and a Jew. With

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<sup>7</sup> This is the outline that Thomas Schreiner developed and is the substance of the Table of Contents in his commentary on Romans (pp. vii-viii).

this haughtiness Paul would not contend in his own private name: he however subdued it, as it were, by soothing means; for he testified that he undertook to address them on account of his apostolic office.<sup>8</sup>

Now verse 14 is quite a statement when one considers how these people were when they had been without Christ as their Lord and Savior. For Paul had earlier quoted the Scriptures regarding them, that “none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; *no one does good, not even one*” (Rom 3:10f). But now Paul wrote of them, “*I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness.*” When God saves people from sin, He not only pardons them, but He purifies them. He not only justifies the sinner through faith, but He also sanctifies the saint through faith. God had been working in this church. Even though Paul had never visited this church, he was “satisfied”, in other words, he was certain that they were “full of goodness.”

Paul was also convinced that the Christians in this church at Rome were “*filled with all knowledge.*” Perhaps his confidence in their knowledge of all things necessary was because Paul had instructed them through this very epistle that they had read. But Paul may have expressed these words to the church at Rome so that they would not be discouraged by the many exhortations that he had addressed to them through this epistle. In expressing himself in this way, he was also commending his apostolic ministry to them.

Paul then declared that their “goodness” and their “knowledge” qualified them to be “*able to instruct one another.*” If we desire to be used of the Lord to instruct others in the faith, we are in need of these two graces to qualify us for the task. We need to be filled with “goodness” and “knowledge.” Here “goodness” may be better understood as “kindness.” If we would desire to have influence for the spiritual good of others, we need to be both kind toward the ones we are trying to help and knowledgeable with the subject that we would teach them. There are many who are characterized by “kindness”, and so, they are qualified to instruct others in this first matter, but they lack “knowledge” and are therefore unsuitable for the task. On the other hand, sadly, there are those who may be “filled with knowledge” but they lack “kindness.” They think that they are qualified to instruct others but are not, for if they are not kind toward others, their knowledge will probably not be received though they impart good content in their teaching. Both kindness, or goodness, and knowledge are necessary. Paul was convinced, was “satisfied”, that these Christians in the church at Rome that they were full of goodness and knowledge and therefore able to instruct one another. Here is John Calvin on this matter:

Two qualifications are especially necessary for him who gives admonitions: the first is kindness, which disposes his mind to aid his brethren by his advice, and also tempers his countenance and his words with courtesy, — and the second is skill in advice or prudence, which secures authority to him, inasmuch as he is able to benefit the hearers whom he addresses. There is indeed nothing more opposed to brotherly admonitions than malignity and arrogance, which make us disdainfully to despise the erring, and to treat them with ridicule, rather than to set them right. Asperity (i.e. severity or roughness) also, whether it appears in words or in the countenance, deprives our admonitions of their fruit. But however you may excel in the feeling of kindness, as well as in courtesy, you are not yet fit to advise, except you possess wisdom and experience. Hence he ascribes both these qualifications to the Romans, bearing them a testimony, — that they were themselves sufficiently competent, without the help of another, to administer mutual exhortations: for he admits, that they abounded both in kindness and wisdom. It hence follows, that they were able to exhort.

Perhaps Paul wrote in verse 14 commending them for their goodness and knowledge because he was mindful that he had instructed them in some difficult matters in this epistle, some of which might have been difficult for them to embrace. **Verses 15** and **16** might suggest this:

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<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, (Baker, 1993), vol. 19, pp. 525f.

***<sup>15</sup>But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup>to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.***

Paul stated that his calling as a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles pressed upon him a sense of responsibility and authority to have “written very boldly” to them. He is alluding to being called by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles. But here rather than using the word, “apostle”, he describes himself as a “minister” or a “servant” of Jesus Christ. He was declaring that he was fulfilling a duty placed upon Him by the Lord to write in the bold manner that he had addressed them.

Several points may be made here. First, Paul believed that he had a ***calling of God*** upon his life to be a minister, that he had been gifted and enabled by God’s grace to stand in this office. Now the office of the apostle ceased with the death of “The Twelve” and the Apostle Paul. But true ministers of Jesus Christ still are to be men called of God and enabled by God’s grace in order to teach and preach “boldly”, even as they understand that God has called them to their task. As we have said before, I believe one of the great curses of the land is uncalled people standing in the place of ministers of the gospel attempting to fulfill a ministry to which God never called them. There is a holy boldness that comes to a God-called minister with the certainty that God has called him and equipped him for that purpose. In fact the calling of God renders a God-called man so that he only be faithful to his calling. Even when he may become weary and discouraged, he cannot remain silent, although he may be tempted to do so. Jeremiah described his own prophetic ministry to which God had called him and how he could not help but proclaim God’s word even after having suffered for doing so.

<sup>7</sup>O LORD, You induced me,  
And I was persuaded;  
You are stronger than I,  
And have prevailed.  
I am in derision daily;  
Everyone mocks me.

<sup>8</sup>For when I spoke, I cried out;  
I shouted, “Violence and plunder!”  
Because the word of the LORD was made to me  
A reproach and a derision daily.

<sup>9</sup>Then I said, “I will not make mention of Him,  
Nor speak anymore in His name.”  
But His word was in my heart like a burning fire  
Shut up in my bones;  
I was weary of holding it back,  
And I could not.

Now each of us as Christians ay experience this to a degree. We know if we speak up regarding the truth of God that people are not going to receive our message and they will probably therefore reject us. But we cannot but speak the Word of God once God has made it known to us. But this compulsion is particularly keen in the man of God called by God to proclaim His Word to His people and to the non-Christian world. We read of how this was demonstrated in the ministry of Peter and James. Their preaching confronted and discredited the Jewish authorities and so those authorities counselled with one another what to do. We read of this in Acts 4:15ff.

<sup>15</sup>But when they (the Jewish leaders) had commanded them (Peter and John) to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, <sup>16</sup>saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*. <sup>17</sup>But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” <sup>18</sup>And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all

nor teach in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup>But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. <sup>20</sup>For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” <sup>21</sup>So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. (Acts 4:15-21)

Paul also wrote of the compulsion that was in his soul due to his sense of God’s calling upon him to proclaim the gospel. He wrote, “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16f). When the Lord reveals His truth to a man or woman in the church, silence is not an option.

Now when Paul described his apostleship to the Gentiles in Romans 15:15 and 16, he cast his language as though he were a priest offering a sacrifice before God, in that he had been instrumental in converting Gentiles to Jesus Christ. Again, Paul wrote,

“But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup>to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles *in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*

Paul cast himself as a priest offering a sacrifice. That sacrifice was the Gentile themselves, but not just any Gentiles, but ones who had been converted through the gospel, ones who were “sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

Now when we speak of Christians as “sanctified by the Holy Spirit”, we should understand that Christians are sanctified in two different ways. The Scriptures speak about Christians being sanctified *positionally* and also *practically*. We are probably most familiar with the idea of **practical sanctification**. This is addressed in the **Westminster Shorter Catechism**:

**Question #35:** What is sanctification?

**Answer:** Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace (1), whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God (2), and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness (3).

(1) Ezek. 36:27; Phil. 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:13. (2) 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:23,24; 1 Thess. 5:23; (3) Ezek. 36:25-27; Rom. 6:4,6, 12-14; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 2:24.

**Practical sanctification** speaks of God transforming a Christian into a more holy Christian, one who increasingly becomes conformed to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit imparts grace to the believer giving him/her both the desire and ability to do the will of God and become more and more Christ-like in life. It is a continual and progressive work in that it is a gradual process that God produces over a lifetime. It is a work of grace in that God performs this work in the lives of His people solely due to His kindness and love that He has for them. Through the work of sanctification, the believer increasingly hates sin and ceases from it, and increasingly loves and practices righteousness. Our sanctification will be complete when we pass from this life into the next and we are delivered from the presence of sin in our lives.

But **positional sanctification** is distinct from practical sanctification. This positional sanctification occurred once for all time for each of us at the time of salvation, or, perhaps more specifically when Christ Jesus purchased His people on His cross. We were purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ and set apart as the unique people of God. **Hebrews 10:14**, “*For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This is the verse that years ago convinced me of the truth of “limited atonement” espoused by Reformed theology rather than the universal atonement taught by Arminians. Arminians say that Jesus Christ died equally for all the world? Reformed theology (Calvinism) says that Jesus Christ died so as to secure the redemption of His people. The Arminian teaches that Jesus secured the redemption for no one, but only made possible the salvation of everyone. But the

The Greek word translated in Romans 15:16 as “sanctified” is ἡγιασμένη (*hagiasmenay*), which is a perfect tense, passive participle. It is the participle form of the word ἅγιος (*hagios*), which is translated “holy.” This describes God having sanctified them or separated them in the past, in other words at their conversion, and they remain sanctified before God. This positional sanctification is how Paul described Gentile Christians that had been converted through His gospel ministry. This act of God’s grace was actuated on our behalf by God, who acted apart from us, apart from our work or effort. This was a work of grace that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit effects on behalf of each of the elect. Here in Romans 15:16 Paul described Gentile converts as positionally “sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament described as sanctified many things associated with the temple, the priesthood, and the sacrifices offered by the priests. Everything that belongs to God was to be *set apart*, or sanctified by Him and unto Him. We read that the tabernacle, the articles of furniture in the tabernacle, the utensils used in the tabernacle, the priests themselves who ministered in the tabernacle, were all sanctified for that purpose. The later temple that replaced the tabernacle was also regarded as set apart as holy before the Lord. All things employed in the service of God, the worship of God, were set apart for God. In the same way God has sanctified or set apart every Christian. Each and every believer is one who has been singled out by God from the human race. All who belong to Jesus Christ have been sanctified. We have been separated, set apart, sanctified in the mind of God from all others. We who are in Christ stand in a covenant relationship with God having been chosen and set apart from the world as a unique people. In the mind and purpose of God we are separate (sanctified) from the fallen world and He has glorious and vastly different designs between them and us whom He has not sanctified. We are sanctified in this sense in that we have been singled out and set apart because God has designs for us that are different from all others.

Although Paul described himself as a priest performing a priestly function, we should not think of ministers or even apostles as priests that are in a special priestly role or position that the laity does not acquire. We differ from the teaching of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the High Anglican Church, who claim to have a priesthood unique to some men who are to serve the laity. The New Testament teaches the priesthood of all believers. Peter wrote of all true Christians being priests. He wrote to Christians, “But you are a chosen race, *a royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). It would be wrong, therefore, to use Paul’s words here in Romans 15:16 to argue for a special priesthood in the church that are separate from the laity. Besides, whereas Paul wrote of offering Gentile Christians as spiritual sacrifices to God, those denominations that teach a special priesthood claim that their priests offer Christ as a sacrifice to His people. The Bible teaches no such priesthood offering Christ as a sacrifice. The Bible speaks of Christ offering Himself as the one High Priest who offered Himself, the one true sacrifice, that brought an end to all sacrifices that atone for sin. Hebrews 10:14 reads, “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” But the Scriptures also teach us that when God uses us to convert a soul, it is as though we were performing the function of a priest, offering a holy (positionally sanctified) convert to God.

Anyone the Lord may use to bring another to salvation through Jesus Christ could describe the success of his evangelistic effort as serving as a priest who has offered to God a holy sacrifice. But even if a Christian never is used by the Lord to bring another to Christ, he is no less a “priest” before God than was the apostle Paul himself. All Christians are priests before God through faith in Jesus Christ. And although each of us may not offer a sanctified sacrifice of a convert to Jesus Christ, as priests we offer other kinds of sacrifices to God. We offer sacrifices when we *praise* God. “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup>you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, *to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 2:4ff). We offer sacrifices to God when we give financially to His work. Hebrews 13:6, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, *for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*” And later in

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Calvinist teaches that Jesus Christ actually secured the salvation of His people, not simply making salvation possible for them. This verse in Hebrews 10:14 proves the Reformed view of the atonement is taught in Holy Scripture.

Hebrews 13:15 we read, “Through him then let us continually offer up *a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”

We next read Paul’s great sense of satisfaction and accomplishment for God to have used him in this gospel ministry. **Verse 17** reads, “*In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.*” The word, “then”, links his statement with what is in verse 16. In other words, God’s use of Paul to enable him to offer converted Gentiles as a sacrifice unto God brought to Paul a great sense of blessing and gratefulness that his God would use him this way. It was a noble work. It was a holy work of a priest of God offering holy sacrifices unto God which he knew God readily received and was pleased.

Paul assumed no personal credit (glory) for what was accomplished through his ministry. He sought to glorify God for all that was being accomplished through his ministry. **Verses 18f** read,

<sup>18</sup>For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience--by word and deed, <sup>19</sup>by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God--so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;

It was Jesus Christ who had used Paul as His instrument to accomplish His good purposes.

Now some argue that if we are to be used of God today we need to have God perform miracles through us also, then the world will believe. Here Paul declared that God had used him to bring about the conversion of the Gentiles through “word and deed”, even “by the power of signs and wonders.” And so, there are those that argue we must pray and seek for God to do the same through us today. Only through “power religion” will people become converted in large numbers. But one must understand the precise use of miracles in the New Testament age; this will preserve oneself from error. People were never brought to saving faith by witnessing a miracle. God has appointed the means of hearing and believing the gospel in order to be saved. In the New Testament world God manifested Himself through His apostles through signs and wonders in order to validate or substantiate that His disciples were legitimate bearers of God’s Word. Miracles were God testifying to the authenticity of the content of the message preached and demonstrating the authority of those who preached the message as the legitimate spokesmen of God. The need for miracles, therefore, is no longer. The message of the apostles was authenticated by God. It needs no more validation. It only needs proclaimed. The insistence on miracles to testify to the authority of the Word today is to pander to the unbelief of a fallen world. Our Lord taught that an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign (cf. Matt. 12:39).

To say that that people may be and will be saved through witnessing signs and wonders diminishes what the Scriptures say regarding the sinfulness of man. God has appointed the Word of God as the means by which He brings faith to His people. That God’s Word teaches miracles have no saving power to convert the soul was taught by our Lord Jesus Himself. Consider the lesson that our Lord gave when He spoke of **the rich man** and **Lazarus**.

<sup>24</sup>And he (that is, the rich man) called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ <sup>25</sup>But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. <sup>26</sup>And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ <sup>27</sup>And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house-- <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers--so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup>**But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’** <sup>30</sup>**And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’** <sup>31</sup>**He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’**” (Luke 16:24-31)

People will *not* come to saving faith even if they witnessed people being raised from the dead. God's power is manifest in saving souls through the employment of His Word. Just as His Word spoke worlds into existence, so He speaks spiritual life into existence through His Word. Faith wrought through so-called miracles will prove to be superficial faith, not saving faith. In John 6 the Lord Jesus had thousands of people gather to Him to make Him king. Was it because they had true saving faith? No, for Jesus declared that their faith was spurious. He said that they only had their bellies filled through His giving them bread. By the end of John 6 after some hard and direct teaching, all those who wanted Him to be their king in the morning, had gone their own ways by the end of the day.

Why then did Paul make reference to what Christ had done through him, both in word and deed? Paul was authenticating his apostolic office. He was asserting that the signs of an apostle had validated him as God's legitimate spokesman. We read in another place in which Paul had reasoned with the church at Corinth that he was a legitimate apostle of Jesus Christ. He could reason with them:

I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup>truly *the signs of an apostle* were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. (2 Cor. 12:11f)

The writer to the Hebrews also addressed the special miracle working power of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. He was writing to second generation Christians, ones who had come to faith through the witness of the apostles. He wrote of them:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. <sup>2</sup>For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, <sup>3</sup>how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us *by those who heard Him, <sup>4</sup>God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit*, according to His own will? (Heb. 2:1-4)

The apostles were those eye witnesses who had heard Him and have communicated to us that Word. It is now for us to believe their testimony, that is, the record they have left us, which is our New Testament. "We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard", that is the Word of God, not to what we might see, that being miracles so-called.

And so, miracles and signs and wonders in the apostolic era of the first century identified and validated true apostles. But miracles and signs and wonders sine the apostolic age has been indicators of false prophets who deceive people. Our Lord taught His disciples, "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). It is said of the man of sin, "The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:9f).

Today it is not the reality of a miracle that substantiates a true messenger of God, but rather if he teaches in accordance with God's revealed and written Word of God. The principles is set forth in **Deuteronomy 13:1ff**, which reads:

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup>and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' - which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' <sup>3</sup>you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup>You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. <sup>5</sup>But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from

the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst. (Deut. 13:1 NKJ)

You see, it was what God had already revealed to them and recorded for them in His law that was to govern their lives. Miracles were no test for validity of truth. After the Word had been delivered through Moses, having been authenticated by God at Mount Sinai, thereafter the witness of a miracle was no test of authority or validity to determine the content of the Word of God.

We also read of Isaiah's warning of false prophets in the days when Israel was under the wrath of God. Isaiah first told the people to cleave to the Lord and then he warned them of false prophets who failed to teach and follow God's written Word.

- <sup>13</sup>The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow;  
Let Him be your fear,  
And let Him be your dread.  
<sup>14</sup>He will be as a sanctuary,  
But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense  
To both the houses of Israel,  
As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.  
<sup>15</sup>And many among them shall stumble;  
They shall fall and be broken,  
Be snared and taken."  
<sup>16</sup>Bind up the testimony,  
Seal the law among my disciples.  
<sup>17</sup>And I will wait on the LORD,  
Who hides His face from the house of Jacob;  
And I will hope in Him.  
<sup>18</sup>Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me!  
We are for signs and wonders in Israel  
From the LORD of hosts,  
Who dwells in Mount Zion.

<sup>19</sup>And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? ***Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?*** <sup>20</sup>***To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*** (Isaiah 8:13-20)

And so, here in Romans 15:19 Paul described himself in the unique role of an apostle. He declared that Jesus Christ had used him by employing what he preached and what he did by way of miracles -- by word and deed. Paul was a legitimized apostle of Jesus Christ; the Lord had validated him and his ministry of the Word.