

## “Other Centered” – PART 2

Romans 15:17-33

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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." 22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. 23 But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, 24 whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. 25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. 27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. 28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. 29 But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. 30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. 33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

**15:17 - So I have reason to be enthusiastic about all Christ Jesus has done through me in my service to God.**

Please note that we know enough about Paul to know he was in no way taking any credit for having been used by God! He knew that Jesus Christ just *had* to rightfully receive the glory for anything that was ever accomplished through his hands. And even beyond that, Paul seemed to never forget where he came from and the grace that was given not only for him to be a part of the kingdom, but even so much more to call him into service. If only we as individuals could keep such reality close to our hearts. Maybe our actions in this world would be different! Paul did not serve and suffer as he did just to make a name for himself, he always had a much higher purpose in mind. He wanted to bring glory to Jesus Christ. "That in all things He might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). A minister's boasting must never be in material things such as buildings, programs, membership, and numbers. Not in fleshly things such as position, charisma, fluency of speech, education, and titles. Paul demonstrated this fact clearly, for he rarely spoke about himself nor about what he had done. He talked only about the things that pertained to God, only about the things brought through Jesus Christ.

However we know that God *had* used Paul and the world *had* been moved through the ministry of Paul! It's not that he was blind to that fact or was masking his joy behind some sort of false humility. He knew what had happened! He wanted his life and work to matter and he poured himself into it lock, stock, and barrel. He at times like this sometimes looked back at the triumphs of his ministry, but any glory that was to be given was not his but the Fathers! However, the cost was high to serve in such a capacity. He had people he loved stab him in the back, and while he was loved by some, he was loathed by others. We know he would have had to have been at one time married, for he would have had to have been in order to be a part of the Jewish Sanhedrin. But she was apparently long gone at this point. No wife, no kids, no permanent home, no retirement benefits. It was not just a *sacrifice*, but a *sacrificial life*.

**15:18-19** *Yet I dare not boast about anything except what Christ has done through me, bringing the Gentiles to God by my message and by the way I worked among them. They were convinced by the power of miraculous signs and wonders and by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum.*

Paul again is giving full credit where "credit was due." He knew God was behind anything miraculous that had occurred by his hands. But Paul was clear about the presence of God upon him because of the fruit that had been produced from his ministry. "*Mighty signs and wonders*" had been witnessed in his ministry. God was fully manifested as being present and even having poured out his glory through Paul's ministry. For Paul, the *people* were the church and the glory of God! THEY were the fruit of his ministry! And for that, God received all the glory!

**"...as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.'" (1 Cor. 1:31).**

**"In God we boast all day long, And praise Your name forever." (Psalm 44:8).**

**15:20-21** *My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else. I have been following the plan spoken of in the Scriptures, where it says, 'Those who have never been told about him will see, and those who have never heard of him will understand.'*

These words of Paul are some of those most often 'swept under the rug.' Today church planting and building is often just a case of "Peter stealing from Paul." We don't generally seek to bring new converts and disciples into our church communities, when it is so much easier to simply appeal to the flesh of people in other pews and fellowships, to bring them over to another who has a slicker worship team and professional child care. There is a church near us that when they started they tried to woo away some of our music people and noted that it wasn't mandatory that they were actually born again but that it would be nice if they were! They also hired early childhood development students from the local university to run their childcare, and again, spiritual state taking the backseat! There is another church near us (and I use the term 'church' loosely here) that was established essentially as the antithesis of JF Believers church, scooping up every disgruntled individual that they could lay their hands on. The result today is they have a wild bunch of disgruntled and angry individuals that are held together with nothing more than mutual distain. These 'birds of a feather' prove James 3:16 "*For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.*"

Sadly, these kind of tactics work well because we live in a "nomadic" spiritual world where churches draw people from other ministries through Hollywood tactics...flashy productions, performance oriented music, expensive buildings and "feel-good" messages...often wholly absent of the Word of God! Paul was not interested in such man-made churches. He was only interested in reaching a lost and dying world, one that did not know the perfect love of Jesus Christ.

**15:22-24** *In fact, my visit to you has been delayed so long because I have been preaching in these places. But now I have finished my work in these regions, and after all these long years of waiting, I am eager to visit you. I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can provide for my journey.*

Paul was passionate in his ministry, and was more than willing to take the gospel to wherever the door would open unto him. This often led him to some crazy places, even to Spain, which the Romans believed to be the "uttermost parts of the earth!" Paul wasn't afraid of the "other side of the tracks." In fact, it appears that he gravitated toward such areas! He went wherever the opportunity availed itself. In today's vernacular Paul would

be saying that he'd been really busy! Paul was consumed by his ministry and therefore by his calling. And he readily accepted the reality that such a calling was going to affect every aspect of his life. His ministry would indeed be personally expensive! But it did not quell his love for these brethren nor did it subdue his desire to be with them.

It would be very easy for us during these crazy days we are living in to close ranks and pull in to survive by our own hand. But we are committed here to actually do the opposite, and have made expenditures and ventures to push forward despite the onslaught against us and the greater church of God throughout the world. We are reaching out in attempt to support our brethren in parts of the world that are in far worse shape than we are!

After reading the whole of this letter and being aware of other such letters to other churches, one cannot help but be aware of the problems that Paul was dealing with. There were divisions, open sin, as well as old fashion opposition and personal attacks against Paul himself. Yet Paul was unmoved. He continued to work diligently to try and straighten out the problems within the churches and to meet their desperate need to grow in Christ. I understand what he faced, at least on some level. No one is trying to kill us yet, but the push back against the greater faith is intense at this point, and people are under great personal and spiritual pressures. A lot of folks have discovered that their standing was based on the church rather than the Holy Spirit and when the church wasn't there, they unraveled.

Paul says he had "... *finished (his) work in these regions.*" This was his way of saying he had completed his task and essentially finished his work where he was. He had "fought a good fight and finished his course." He had "fully preached the gospel of Christ." (Romans 15:19) Therefore, he was ready to "move on" to new and greener pastures. Sometimes a pastor finds himself in such a situation, where he has done all he can do in a position and location. If he serves Jesus first and the church second, he can be compelled for the sake of his first calling to move on if he desires to "finish well" the mission that is upon his life.

**15:25-29** *But before I come, I must go to Jerusalem to take a gift to the believers there. For you see, the believers in Macedonia and Achaia have eagerly taken up an offering for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. They were glad to do this because they feel they owe a real debt to them. Since the Gentiles received the spiritual blessings of the Good News from the believers in Jerusalem, they feel the least they can do in return is to help them financially. As soon as I have delivered this money and completed this good deed of theirs, I will come to see you on my way to Spain. And I am sure that when I come, Christ will richly bless our time together.*

Paul had one more job he needed to take care of before he traveled to Rome to see them. He had to stop by Jerusalem, do a little ministering, and pick up an offering from the Gentiles there to be delivered to their Jewish brothers and sisters! How unthinkable in any other realm! Gentiles assisting Jews? Times were tough and Christians were under fire throughout the region. Yet these believers did not become consumed with themselves and their own issues, because invariably there is always someone who has it worse than we do! It is a real test for any community as to whether they will continue to thrive and do the work of the ministry no matter what comes at them, or whether they will move to form a "holy huddle" to ride out personal and corporate trials at the expense of kingdom and a lost world!

Paul points out that the Gentiles understood and were eternally grateful for the Jewish nation as keepers of the Words of God. It was that commitment that ultimately brought the gospel to the Gentile people as per destined by God Himself. The Gentiles weren't going to forget. They felt they had a debt to those who delivered the gospel and ultimately their salvation, and now when they had a chance to give back what they had been taking in. They would not forget that what *they* had was of such great value, and they would not forget those who

brought it to them now that things were difficult! Sadly, we here in America tend to be takers only and when the time comes to reciprocate we are nowhere to be found!

Paul may have indeed “come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ,” (verse 29)...that *Christ* (would) *richly bless* (their) *time together*, but he would also come in chains. For when Paul eventually made it to Rome, he came as a guest of the Roman military. For Paul, the “blessings of the gospel” would mean he would come to Rome as a prisoner “because of the gospel.” It’s interesting that Rome would take away his freedom of movement and sequestered him to his house, and yet undeterred he just kept on doing the Lord’s work! For two years he was held in his house, and we have no record of a pity party or a surrender to his woes. He simply adjusted his trajectory and kept doing the Lord’s work, because God never promised him a rose garden, and he never got one. There was nothing more important than the work of Christ, or the care of the brethren! He had a mission, and he was not going to be deterred.

**15:30-32** *Dear brothers and sisters, I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to join in my struggle by praying to God for me. Do this because of your love for me, given to you by the Holy Spirit. Pray that I will be rescued from those in Judea who refuse to obey God. Pray also that the believers there will be willing to accept the donation I am taking to Jerusalem. Then, by the will of God, I will be able to come to you with a joyful heart, and we will be an encouragement to each other.*

Paul was not naïve concerning what was waiting for him. He seemed to be aware of the difficulties that lay ahead. But again, such failed to deter him. Back on that road to Damascus God showed Paul “the great things he must suffer for my names sake.” And yet having such a vision of the future would not stop him from “finishing well.” For apparently his future was not weighing upon him as heavily as his past!

Yet Paul was not a fool. He wanted to keep ministering just as long as possible, and he was not going to be deterred by his own pride. He asks the folks in Rome to pray....pray a lot! He asks that they strive together with him in prayer ...prayer for him! Indeed the prayers were going up from his heart concerning them, and he was seeking some reciprocal action. Whoever said that we shouldn’t pray for ourselves forgot to tell Paul. Paul knew he was at war, and he wanted the saints at Rome to know it too. For Paul, there was no holding back. Would they unite with him, or would they lose themselves in themselves?

**15:33** *And now may God, who gives us his peace, be with you all. Amen.*

Despite all that he knew lay ahead, Paul’s last word in this chapter was not for him, but for them. His love was never ceased...whether in letter or from the pulpit, he loved them in truth and faithfulness.