

Romans #25
Ministry
Romans 15:14

One of the key words in the closing chapters of Romans is "ministry." In fact, Paul used three different Greek words to discuss the theme. In Romans 15:8, 25, and 31, he uses the Greek word that literally means "servant" or "service." **Our English word "deacon" comes from that same word.** In verse 16 and 27 the word "minister" comes from the Greek word that most often refers to service in public office or service in the temple. In Romans 15:16 he used a word that is found nowhere else in the Greek New Testament; and it means "to perform sacred rites, to minister in a priestly service."

Therefore, look with me as we study these three ministries.

First, he talks about the ministry of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Verses 8-13 say, "Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. ⁹And he came so the Gentiles might also give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote: I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name. And in another place it is written, Rejoice, O you Gentiles, along with his people, the Jews. And yet again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; praise him, all you people of the earth. And the prophet Isaiah said, The heir to David's throne will come, and he will rule over the Gentiles. They will place their hopes on him. So I pray that God, who gives you hope, will keep you happy and full of peace as you believe in him. May you overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."

The supreme example of ministry must always be Jesus Christ. He said in Luke 22:27, "But I am among you as he that serves." He came first of all to minister to the Jews, that through Israel He might be able to minister to the Gentiles. "To the Jew first" is a principle that was followed in the earthly ministry of Christ and in the early ministry of the Church.

For example, John the Baptist came to minister to the nation of Israel to prepare them for their Messiah. When Jesus began His ministry, it was only to the people of Israel. When He sent out the Apostles on their first evangelistic mission, Matthew 10:5-6 says that He gave them these orders, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That does not mean that He ignored individual Gentiles, because He did minister to a few; but His major emphasis was on Israel.

Luke 24:44-49 tells us that after His resurrection, Jesus commanded the Apostles to remain in Jerusalem and begin their ministry there. The period covered by Acts 1-7 is characterized by a ministry only to Jews or Jewish proselytes. It was not until Acts 8 that the Gospel went to the Samaritans; in Acts 10 it went to the Gentiles. Then Acts 13:1-3 tells us that through the ministry of Paul, it went throughout the Romans Empire.

When He came and died, Jesus Christ confirmed the promises that God made to Abraham and the other "fathers" of the Jewish nation, as seen in Luke 1:30-33, 46-55, & 67-80). Some of these promises have already been fulfilled, but many await fulfillment when He returns to earth to establish His Kingdom.

Was it selfish of God to emphasize the Jews? No, because through the Jews, He would send the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles. In fact, the first Christians were Jewish believers. We have been told in John 4:22 that "Salvation is of the Jews." In the Old Testament period, God chose Israel to be a minister to the Gentiles; but instead, Israel copied the idolatrous ways of the Gentiles and had to be chastened. In the New Testament period, God chose Jewish believers to carry the Good News to the Gentiles, and they obeyed Him.

There is a beautiful progression in the promises that Paul quoted in verses 9 through 12.

1. In verse 9, he says the Jews glorify God "among" the Gentiles—and is quoting from Psalm 18:49.
2. In verse 10, he says the Gentiles rejoice "with" the Jews—and is quoting from Deuteronomy 32:43.
3. In verse 11, he says all the Jews and Gentiles "together" praise God—and he is quoting from Psalm 117:1.
4. In verse 12, he says Christ shall reign over Jews and Gentiles—and he is quoting from Isaiah 11:10.

Romans 15:8 covers the period of the Gospels and Acts 1-7. Romans 15:9 describes the ministry of Paul as he witnessed among the Gentiles. Romans 15:10 could be applied to the church council in Acts 15 when the Gentiles were given equal status "with his people." Today, Jew and Gentiles in the church are praising God together.

The word "trust" at the end of verse 12 is actually the Greek word for "hope." At one time the Gentiles were "without hope" (Ephesians 2:12), but now in Christ they have hope. Not only do believers have hope, but they also have joy and peace and power (v. 13). The Holy Spirit of God shares these blessings with them as they yield to Him.

Because the Jewish Christians were faithful to take the gospel to the Gentiles, the nations of the world today have the opportunity to trust Christ as Savior.

Second, Paul talks about his ministry to the Gentiles. Verses 14-24 say, "I am fully convinced, dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well that you are able to teach others all about them. Even so, I have been bold enough to emphasize some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder from me. For I am, by God's grace, a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News and offer you up as a fragrant sacrifice to God so that you might be pure and pleasing to him by the Holy Spirit. So it is right for me to be enthusiastic about all Christ Jesus has done through me in my service to God. I dare not boast of anything else. I have brought the Gentiles to God by my message and by the way I lived before them. I have won them over by the miracles done through me as signs from God—all by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ all the way from Jerusalem clear over into Illyricum (il-lir-ic-um). 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. 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 send me on my way again."

Unless we understand the distinctive ministry of Paul, we will not fully appreciate the message of God's grace. Paul explained the characteristics in his ministry.

First of all, verses 14-15 say it was received by grace. When he was Saul of Tarsus, the crusading rabbi, Paul knew nothing of the grace of God. He persecuted the Church and sought to destroy it. **When Paul met Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road (Acts 9), he experienced the grace of God.** He says in 1 Corinthians 15:8-11 that it was God's grace that saved him, and it was God's grace that called him and made him an apostle. And he says in Romans 1:5, "We have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all

nations, for His name." In Ephesians 3, Paul explained his ministry to the gentiles in greater detail.

Second, verse 16 says it was centered in the Gospel. As mentioned before, Paul used two different words for "minister" in this verse, but the emphasis is on priestly service. Paul looked upon himself as a priest at the altar, offering up to God the Gentiles he had won to Christ. **1 Peter 2:5 indicates they were a "spiritual sacrifice" to the glory of God.** Even his preaching of the Gospel was a "priestly duty." This insight into ministry certainly adds dignity and responsibility to our service. Malachi 1:6-14 tells us that it was important that the priest offer to God only that which was the best.

Notice the involvement of the Trinity in the ministry of the Word. Paul was the minister of Jesus Christ; he preached "the Gospel of God"; and he served in the power of the Holy Spirit of God who sanctified his ministry. What a privilege, and yet what a responsibility, to be the servant of the Triune God, winning the lost to Jesus Christ. **We must remember that soul-winning is a priestly ministry, a sacred privilege.** And we must serve the Lord with dedication and devotion just as the priest in the temple.

Third, verse 17 says it was done for God's glory. The word "glory" carries the idea of "boast, to take pride in," but Paul was not bragging about his ministry. He was boasting in what the Lord had done. **The apostle did not serve and suffer as he did just to make a name for himself, for he had a much higher purpose in mind.** He wanted to bring glory to Jesus Christ, as seen in Colossians 1:18, "That in all things He might have the preeminence."

Four, verses 18-19 say that it was done by God's power. The Holy Spirit empowered Paul to minister, and enabled him to perform mighty signs and wonders. The miracles God used Paul to do were "signs" in that they came from God and revealed Him to others. **And they were "wonders" in that they aroused the wonder of the people.** But their purpose was always to open the way for the preaching of the Gospel. Hebrews 2:1-4 tells us that miracles were given to authenticate the messenger and the message. **Miracles by themselves can never save the lost.** When Paul healed the crippled man at Lystra (Acts 14), the immediate response was pagan: the people called Paul and Barnabas gods and tried to worship them. When Paul shared the Gospel with them, they did not respond so enthusiastically. Finally, the people stoned Paul and left him for dead outside the city walls.

The Spirit of God empowered Paul to share the Word, and Romans 15:8 says the purpose was to "make the Gentiles obedient..." It was "by word and deed" that the apostles shared the Good News.

Five, verses 20-24 says that Paul's ministry was according to God's plan. God had a special plan for Paul to follow: he was not to preach where any other apostle had ministered.

This is one of evidence that Peter had not founded the churches at Rome, or had been to Rome; for this would have prevented Paul from going there. Verse 19 says, **“From Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum (il-lir-ic-um).”** That covers about 1,400 miles. When you consider the slowness of travel and the dangers involved, you can appreciate the tremendous achievement of Paul's missionary ministry.

And last of all, Paul talks about the Gentile's ministry to the Jews. Verses 25-33 say, **“But before I come, I must go down to Jerusalem to take a gift to the Christians there. For you see, the believers in Greece have eagerly taken up an offering for the Christians in Jerusalem, who are going through such hard times. They were very glad to do this because they feel they owe a real debt to them. Since the Gentiles received the wonderful spiritual blessings of the Good News from the Jewish Christians, they feel the least they can do in return is 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 give me a great blessing for you. Dear friends, I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to join me 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 Christians there will be willing to accept the donation I am bringing them. Then, by the will of God, I will be able to come to you with a happy heart, and we will be an encouragement to each other. And now may God, who gives us his peace, be with you all. Amen.”**

Paul and his associates had received a special offering from the Gentile churches in Greece for the suffering Jewish saints in Jerusalem. Details about this collection are recorded in 2 Corinthians 8-9. There are several purposes behind this special offering. **To begin with, it was an expression of love on the part of the Gentiles toward their Jewish brethren.** Second, it meant practical relief at a time when the poor Jewish believers needed it most. **Third, it helped to unite Jews and Gentiles in the church.** It was a bond that brought them closer together.

Paul looked upon this offering as the paying of a debt. The Gentiles had received **“spiritual”** wealth from the Jews. They now returned **“material”** wealth, paying their debt. **Romans 1:14 tells us that Paul considered himself a “debtor” to the whole world.** He also considered the Gentle Christians debtors to the Jews, for it was the Jews who gave to the Gentiles the Word of God and the

Son of God. We Christians ought to feel an obligation to Israel, and to pay that debt by praying and sharing the Gospel with them.

Not only was this offering a payment of a debt, but verse 28 says it was also "fruit." Giving is always a fruit of commitment. It is a biblical fact, when the life of the Spirit flows through a church, giving is no problem. **When God is at work, people are willing to give their money, because they have given themselves.** It is a matter of obedience to the Lord and testimony to others.

Let me close our study of the Book of Romans with this simple statement: Christians are established by the truth, which explains why Paul wrote this letter. To explain God's plan of salvation to Christians so they would be established, and so they would share the truth with the lost. After all, we cannot really share with others something we do not have ourselves.

This means that our own study of Romans should make us more stable in the faith, and more excited to share Christ with others. The result, "To the only wise God, be glory through Jesus Christ forever."