

Paul's Résumé
Romans 15:15-16
ABC 8/13/17

The Apostle Paul's life is amazing. In the times in which he lived, his situation appeared absurd. On one side there was Rome, metropolis of the world, heart of the Empire, enforcing peace with her soldiers. On the other side was this little Jew, powerless, armed only with something he called the *good news*. Yet he changed the history of Rome, Western civilization, & even our own lives. Obviously, there was something about him that set him apart. Paul has fascinated even secular minds. Michael Borodin, an American Communist who discipled Ho Chi Minh & others, once was heard to say, *I used to read the NT. Again & again I read it. It is the most wonderful story ever told. That man Paul. He was a real revolutionary. I take my hat off to him.*¹ Paul might be admired by many, but to the Christian, Paul's life is even more impressive because it was transformed just as ours are being transformed.

We've reached the point in Romans where we have some of Paul's most personal comments about his own heart & life. As we've seen, he was a man with holy obsessions, especially for holy living. Holy living is rarely glamorous or thrilling or breathtaking. That's why it's so easy to be caught in the riptide of mediocrity & apathy. Whether changing diapers or grading papers or selling cars or cleaning houses or taking an exam or pounding nails or moving dirt, we're to be obsessed that all be done with everything we can put into it so the name & cause of our Savior, Jesus Christ is honored. Today, we'll discover, tucked inside his personal résumé, Paul's obsession with the grace of God. **14-21** PRAY

In vss 15-16, Paul refers to 3 different positions or roles he had in life: professor, preacher, & priest. & all 3 are the direct result of God's grace toward Him. **Because of the grace** is the key phrase for every aspect of Paul's life. If you bumped into Paul, he would spill grace. If you talked to Paul, he'd speak grace. If you prayed with Paul, he would appeal to the grace of God. Paul never fully recovered from his conversion. Paul was gripped by the saving grace of God. Max

¹ John McCook Roots, *Chou: An Informal Biography of China's Legendary Chou En-Lai*, p 34

Lucado wrote his book, *In the Grip of Grace*, several years ago. He began the book by telling a story he'd created to declare the truths of grace; a story he entitled, *The Parable of the River*.

Once there were 5 sons who lived in a mountain castle with their father. The eldest was an obedient son, but his 4 younger brothers were rebellious. Their father had warned them of the river, but the younger sons hadn't listened.

The father had begged these 4 rebellious sons to stay clear of the bank, lest they be swept downstream, but the river's lure was too strong. Each day they ventured closer & closer, until one son dared to reach in & feel the waters. *Hold my hand so I won't fall in*, he said, & his brothers did.

However, when he touched the water, the current yanked all 4 of them into the rapids & rolled them down the river. Over rocks they bounced, through channels they roared, on the swells they rode. Their cries for help were lost in the rage of the river. After hours of struggle, they surrendered to the pull of the river & finally found themselves dumped on the bank of a strange land, in a distant country, in a barren place.

After some time, they gathered their courage & reentered the waters. The brothers were hoping to walk upstream, but the current was too strong. They attempted to walk along the river's edge, but the terrain was too steep. They considered climbing the mountains, but the peaks were too high. Besides, they did not know the way.

Lucado goes on to talk about how each of the 4 brothers made their lives there in a foreign land.

One of them decided the only way back to his father was to build a path back up the river & walk back. He said, *There is only this option. Rock upon rock I will stack until I have enough rocks to travel upstream to the castle of my father. When he sees how hard I have worked & how diligent I have been, he'll have no choice but to open the door & let me into his house.*

After several days, a rescuer appears. It is the oldest son. But tragically, every one of his brothers rejects his offer of help.

The brother building a path upstream has been able to take 5 steps homeward, of which he's very proud, but when the rescuer tells him there are five million steps to go, he grows angry & begins to throw rocks at his oldest brother. In spite of the possibility of rescue, he prefers to work his way home & earn his father's forgiveness, & thus, rejects the firstborn son.²

The analogies are obvious, are they not? Look back at Paul's history as a faithful Hebrew, a devoted defender of the Law & a meticulous keeper of all the rules & regulations of the Jewish people. He would have been the brother on the river bank, working at the futile task of building a path to heaven out of the rocks of man-made righteousness. He had walked 5 steps, but had 5 million to go. Paul experienced God's saving grace on that pathway, while heading to Damascus to persecute the Christians there. In a flash of light from the sky, the appearance of Christ to Paul brought about a flash of divine light. While he physically went blind for several days, he gained

² pp 1-6

spiritual sight. He was brought to life through faith in his newly found Lord, Jesus Christ. Paul would later write his testimony,

I was circumcised the 8th day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ (Phil 3:5-7).

After his conversion, Paul began a remarkable ministry that has continued to impact the church for 2,000 years & it's all because of God's grace. It was grace, meaning it wasn't something Paul deserved or earned, but God decided to give freely. & it was grace given, meaning God initiated this & acted. & it was given by God, clearly again highlighting this was God's sovereign choice & merciful gift of grace on Paul. But what was this grace given by God? Vs 16 goes on to explain that it was Paul's calling as a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. By God's grace, we see here, he was a ...

- professor,
- preacher, &
- priest.

It was Paul's job to be a teacher or professor. It was Paul's jurisdiction or field of operation to be a preacher to the Gentiles. It was Paul's joy to be a priest unto God.

1. Professor Look back at the 1st part of vs 15. **But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again.** Paul the professor speaks **boldly** to the Romans. Why is there the need for boldness? Sometimes a person who already knows what you're telling them gets frustrated or upset that you're reminding them of what they already know. This is like the teenager who doesn't like to be reminded again & again, *Drive safely*, or, *Be careful*. Did you get the response I did, sometimes with an eye-roll thrown in? *I know, Dad!* But as a parent, you keep reminding them. What had Paul **boldly** reminded them of? Many things including the fact that those who haven't heard & accepted the gospel are condemned; just being moral won't get a person to heaven; a person is justified by faith not by good works; through one person sin came into the world; where sin increased, grace increased even more; we died to the law & are no longer under the law; nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus; & God will keep His promises to Israel despite their faithlessness. Paul didn't pull any punches & makes it plain. His

purpose is to *remind* his readers of what they know. Even though he assumed that the Romans were **full of goodness** (14), Paul was bold to confront a number of possible problems that might pop up in the church there. Although he knew that they had **all knowledge** (14), he didn't assume they always remembered what they knew, & so he reminded them of it. Why do we need to be reminded of things? Because we're forgetful, easily distracted, & we think we know more than we really do. Someone has said that repetition is the 1st law of teaching... We all need reminders of God's truth.

The Roman believers were surrounded by the challenges of life & the difficulties of building not only their lives, but a church. So like a great professor, Paul gave them, & us, a number of reminders to help us pass the exams of life. With these & other believers, Paul often spent time reminding them of the truths of God's grace. Paul had spent 3 years teaching the Ephesian believers, establishing the elders as shepherds, & then, in his farewell, he exhorts them to, **remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*** (Acts 20:35). Paul challenged the Galatians to join him in being eager to, **remember the poor** (2:10). As Timothy struggled in his ministry as a young & inexperienced pastor, Paul encouraged him to, **remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead ... for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment** (2 Tim 2:8-9). One of the best things we can do at times, to refresh our holy obsession for God, is to review & remember. Why do you think Jesus gave us *the Lord's Supper*, communion to repeat over & over? It's the Table of what? Remembrance. We do this to remember Him! We all need constant reminders of what we already know of God & His Word. That's why we're equipped & able to admonish & encourage one another (14).

2. Preacher What about Paul's role as preacher. What does he say? **Because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.** Paul's job was to be a teacher. Paul's jurisdiction, his area of responsibility was to be a preacher primarily to the Gentiles. In Gal 2, we're told that Peter primarily preached to the Jews & Paul to the Gentiles. The predominant influencer of the church, the body of Christ, wasn't Peter, but Paul. Soon after Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, the Lord said to Ananias in a vision that Paul **is a chosen instrument of**

Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). In Rom 1:5 Paul revealed that God had made him an apostle **to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles**. Paul never says he's been appointed as the chief instrument of Christ because of his superior intellect, or his speaking ability, or his background in the law, or his personality, or anything like that. Paul directly links his preaching office to the fact that he's a recipient of the grace of God. He is gripped with the truth that God's grace hasn't only redeemed him, but has ordained & commissioned him. Perhaps this is the reason Paul doesn't flash his credentials as an apostle here. He doesn't say, *Hey, listen, I'm not only your professor, I'm an apostle*. Instead, he says, *I'm a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles*. The word **minister** shows his humility. He could have used other words to describe himself. He could have called himself a *slave* or *servant* of Jesus Christ. But he chose not to. The word **minister** is the Greek word which gives us our English word, *liturgy*. The word originally referred to someone who served in public office at his own expense.³ In other words, there was no salary, no pension, no benefit package, just service for the public good out of a generous heart. Over time, this word came to refer to someone who volunteered to serve their country or their city in some way. A couple of examples:

The Athenians were the greatest naval power of the ancient world. One of the most patriotic things a wealthy man could do was underwrite the expenses of one warship for a year. This was an incredible sacrifice for the good of his country. He was a **minister**.

The word was also used in relation to the Olympic games. During these there would be the famous torch race. The Athenians would be divided into 10 tribes. Teams from each tribe would race each other in a relay carrying a torch. We still speak of handing off the torch, don't we? These games were paid for by *ministers*, men who not only paid the expenses, but spent time selecting & training the athletes to represent their tribe.

Over time the word was associated with people who performed religious duties, more than likely because the duties were voluntary. Out of this came the translation *minister*, which was a

³ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the NT*, p 205

reference to someone who handled the liturgies of the church.⁴ Paul is announcing that he views himself as so gripped by grace that he's willing to pour out all he owns & all he is for the sake of his new family, his new tribe, his new country. No matter what the cost, no matter how much time it demanded, he was willing to sacrifice everything to win the race, to pass on the torch, & to equip the ship & fight the good fight of faith. It didn't matter to him if it cost him his life.

Like many physicians, Dr. Evan Kane became preoccupied with a particular area of medicine. His strong feelings concerned the use of general anesthesia in surgery. Dr. Kane believed most major operations could & should be performed under a local anesthetic. In his opinion, the hazards of general anesthesia outweighed the risks of the surgery itself. His mission was to prove to his colleagues that local anesthesia was worth exploring.

To prove the viability of major surgery using only a local anesthetic, Kane would have to find a patient brave enough to go through a surgery without general anesthesia. In his 37 years as a surgeon, Kane had performed nearly 4,000 appendectomies. It wasn't long before he found a patient who needed an appendectomy, & would volunteer to take the risk of only local anesthesia.

The patient was prepped in all the normal ways, but in the operating room was given only a local anesthetic. As he had thousands of times before, Dr. Kane entered the abdomen, slicing tissue & clamping blood vessels as he operated on his patient. Locating the appendix, he skillfully clipped it away, folded the stump back in place, & sewed up the patient's wound, all with the patient being fully awake & experiencing only minor discomfort.

After 2 days of recovery, much faster than general anesthesia cases, the patient was released from the hospital to recuperate at home. Dr. Kane had achieved his goal. His patient was too credible a testimony to deny or ignore. You see, Dr. Evan Kane operated on himself. He was the only patient he could find willing to take the risk & make the sacrifice. Since this surgery in 1921, Dr. Kane's technique has changed the practice of surgery & probably saved countless numbers of people.⁵

Is it any wonder that the people of God who make the most difference in our lives are not the ones who walk around strutting their stuff & flashing their credentials to remind us of how much they know & how much they matter? Instead, they are usually volunteers who offer their lives, their hearts, their possessions, their time to save countless lives. Everyone of us as Christians, like Paul, are called to be ministers & serve others, all for the glory of God. Like Paul, we must be enamored by the grace of God & the God of grace. This is Paul the professor & Paul the preacher. There's one more role of Paul's in this text.

3. Priest As a:

⁴ William Barclay, *Romans*, p 202

⁵ Boa, K., & Kruidenier, W. *Romans*, Vol 6, p 446

- professor, Paul was clearly motivated by grace;
- preacher, Paul delivered the message of grace;
- priest, Paul was involved in the miracle of grace.

Notice vs **16** again.

If being a professor was Paul's *job*, & preaching to the Gentiles was Paul's *jurisdiction*, then, being a priest unto God was Paul's *joy*. As a priest on this side of Jesus' death & resurrection, Paul wasn't offering up a lamb or a grain offering to atone for sins or to appease God. As you know, Christianity has only one Priest, Jesus Himself. He alone has made atonement for our sins by His death on the cross & He makes intercession for us before the Father. That's why the church's preachers, pastors, or ministers are never called priests in the NT. But here, as Paul is writing of his ministry to the Gentiles, he speaks of his *priestly duty*. This is striking because the words aren't used in this way elsewhere & also because in other places Paul avoids what are usually thought of as normal ministerial duties. An example is baptism. He told the Corinthians he didn't baptize often & was glad he had only baptized a few persons in their city (1 Cor 1:14–17). Paul isn't negating the priesthood of all believers or setting up a special class of Christian priests, who are intermediaries between people & God. That would contradict what he says in Eph 2:18, **for through Him (Jesus) we both (Jewish & Gentile believers) have our access in one Spirit to the Father**. Jesus alone is our High Priest. We all have direct access to God's throne through Him (Heb 4:14-16). What Paul is doing is giving us an illustration of how we all should serve the Lord: as believer priests, we should offer up as worship to Him any results or fruit of our ministries that God gives through the gospel. Paul is making a contrast between what priests are normally thought of as doing & what he was actually called to do as minister to the Gentiles. Priests stand between men & God & offer sacrifices. The priestly duty to which Paul refers is to proclaim the gospel. **Ministering as a priest the gospel of God**. Paul was giving the gospel to Gentiles so he might offer them up to God. Obviously he wasn't going to kill them & burn them like OT priests did with animals as offerings. But he says the Gentile people saved through his ministry would be his sacrificial offering on God's altar. & the gospel is what would make them acceptable. The gospel is the good news that Jesus has already made the sacrifice necessary to

pay for our sins & make us acceptable. Only in the life of Jesus as our perfection & the death of Jesus as our payment for sin can we be accepted by God. Only with Jesus as our true High Priest can we get to God. But through faith in that wondrous gospel of Jesus, we can be an offering that's accepted by God. We can enter new life by the power of Jesus' resurrection & become living sacrifices worshipping God by all we do. We saw that in Rom 12:1; we must **present our bodies a living & holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is our spiritual service of worship.** & Paul's perspective on his ministry was that he was also offering up to God all those saved by God's grace through his ministry. Paul was focused on reaching people, teaching people, & preparing people as holy offerings to God. His efforts as an apostle & evangelist & pastor & teacher were given to transforming & training people to offer to God. He was offering to God this miracle of grace, sanctified Gentile believers. What mattered most to Paul were the people. It wasn't his job, not his jurisdiction, not even his own sense of satisfaction & joy that mattered the most to him. What was it? Seeing sanctified, growing, holy, maturing disciples. What a great challenge to everyone of us to be involved in teaching & training & discipling each other so that we all might be **sanctified by the Holy Spirit.** This should be our joy.

Notice as well the Trinity here. God gives grace to be a minister of Christ Jesus as we're being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The Triune God is actively involved in our salvation, sanctification, & one day, glorification. Charles Hodge writes:

In this beautiful passage we see the nature of the only priesthood which belongs to the Christian ministry. It is not their office to make atonement for sin, or to offer a propitiatory sacrifice to God, but by the preaching of the gospel to bring men, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, to offer themselves as a living sacrifice, holy & acceptable to God.⁶

We hear a great deal about goal-setting these days: Companies & people & organizations set goals & make 5-yr plans & such. Paul's goal is this: **so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.** That is what Paul says God has called him to do. Gentiles were considered to be unclean by Jews, but, according to Paul, they were to become an offering sanctified to God by the Holy Spirit. The word *sanctified* means to be set apart to God & dedicated or consecrated to Him. Paul said this of them at the very beginning of the letter: **To all**

⁶ *Romans*, p 439

in Rome who are loved by God & called to be saints (Rom 1:7). How are people sanctified? The 1st way is simply by their becoming Christians, for all who become Christians also become saints, since Christians are by definition people set apart for God. The 2nd way is by offering their bodies to God **as living sacrifices** (Rom 12:1). Sometimes we lose sight of this & become preoccupied with the programs we run, the ministry we support, the subject we teach, the books we read, & forget that the purpose of all the programs, classes, books, lessons, & activities is nothing less than the formation of strong, sanctified Christians who are set apart & holy, acceptable offerings unto God (Rom 12:1-2). Paul saw himself dressed in priestly garments, lifting up the souls of people, ascending as a sweet smelling aroma to God Himself.

Paul is saying, *I'm a priest. My life is the sacrifice, but furthermore, so are the lives of those I help to bring to a saving knowledge of God. I'm giving them over to Him just like a priest gives a sacrifice to God. Not to atone for me. I've already been atoned for.*

That's the point of the 1st 15 chapters of Romans. Don't think Paul has the idea that if he doesn't get enough souls notched on his belt he can't atone for his sins. God forbid! May it never be! But he is saying this, *I long to offer sanctified sacrifices to God. Just like the sacrifices of the OT had to be perfect, I long to bring sanctified Gentiles to God.* Paul wasn't satisfied with somebody simply praying a prayer or saying they believed in Jesus or signing a card. Paul wanted to see people who had been turned inside out by the work of the Holy Spirit & were being conformed to Jesus Christ. He wanted to see Gentiles who not only professed Christ, but had become **sanctified by the Holy Spirit**. He wanted to see not simply professions of faith, but heaven wrought godliness in saved sinners. He wanted to see lives transformed. That's what he was excited about. That's what he wanted to give to God. *Father, I want to give you people that are on fire for Christ, who love Your Word, who are growing in grace, & who are being conformed to Your image.* Shouldn't that be our goal as well. We need to have it as our aim to not merely profess Christ, but to have a transformed life, a godliness worked by the Holy Spirit in our hearts, heads, & hands. Just as the priest brought animals to sacrifice before the Lord, we work to bring others as an offering to the Lord. But there's a huge difference: The priest presented dead animals to the Lord. We strive to present ourselves & others as living sacrifices to God. With this mindset it

makes the most mundane daily occurrences holy. It makes, all of life ministry. Paul was gripped by the grace of God, serving with grace the people of God, all for the glory of God. When we see our service like this, our lives will be changed. A pie baked for a neighbor becomes an offering to God; a child loved is an act of worship; an employee treated with dignity becomes a hymn of praise; the gospel shared with an unbeliever becomes a sweet gift to God; a SS class becomes a holy place where you handle sacred things. This is what it means to become gripped by God's grace; this is to be our holy obsession. While ministry helps others to be saved or to grow in Christ, our primary aim in ministry shouldn't be to help others, but to minister to the Lord (Acts 13:2; 2 Sam 6:14-21). We want our service to be an offering that's acceptable to Him, **sanctified by the Holy Spirit**. We don't serve for the praise we get from others or even for the satisfaction of seeing others helped. We do it as an act of worship to God. Focusing on ministry as worship guards us from becoming a people-pleaser & it helps us to process criticism. I've seen people in ministry devastated because people didn't like them or criticized them. Of course if the criticism is legitimate, you need to thank the critic & make appropriate changes. But if you're being disliked or criticized because you confronted sin or tried to correct a problem (Gal 4:16), & your focus is on doing it as an act of worship to God, then you can absorb the rejection & criticism from people, knowing you pleased the Lord. This mindset led one believer to make this commitment to Christ, *The will of God: nothing less; nothing more; nothing else.*⁷ Another believer said it this way, *No reserve! No regrets! No retreat!*⁸ They had become gripped by the love & grace of the Lord. & this grace & this love that is *so amazing, so divine, Demands what? My soul, my life, my all.*⁹ This is living with holy obsession. This is saying, *No reserve! No regrets! No retreat!* I believe this is what it means to be gripped by the grace of God.

Pray as the men come for Communion

⁷ Attributed to a variety of people

⁸ William Borden, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Whiting_Borden

⁹ Isaac Watts, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, #185 in our hymnal

As we come to the communion table we do so in obedience to Jesus' command to remember Him. So what does it mean to remember? Does it simply suggest we shouldn't let thoughts slip out of your mind? Does it mean we reminisce on the sufferings of Jesus so I feel really thankful or really awful? In the Bible, a call to remember is a vibrant, powerful, & participatory concept where we recalibrate our lives according to what's being remembered. According to Herman Ridderbos *It is not merely a subjective recalling to mind, but an active manifestation of the continuing & actual significance of the death of Christ.* We think *remembering* simply means recalling something to mind something that's no longer a present reality. Nothing could be further from a Jewish conception. In Jewish thought, *remembering* means participating here & now in certain defining events in the past & also in the future. For example, here are 2 examples where the OT remembers in an active way of bringing past realities into present-day living.

After the flood, God tells Noah the rainbow is the covenant sign that He won't cover the whole earth in judgment with water again. Each time the sign of the rainbow appears the covenant is remembered.

When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God & every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. & God said to Noah, *This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me & all flesh that is on the earth* (Gen 9:16-17).

The sign of the rainbow reminds & reassures us of God's promises that still apply today.

The greatest picture of redemption in the OT is the exodus of Israel from Egypt, memorialized in the Passover meal. Every year the Israelites would again participate in this meal to remember who, or whose, they were. It's not dry history to be learned but dynamic history to be lived. They participate in the meal because they are partakers in the reality of this redemption as Israelites.

Now this day will be a memorial to you, & you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance (Ex 12:14).

John Flavel distinguished between two types of remembering. The 1st is speculative & fleeting, & the 2nd is affectionate & permanent.

A speculative remembrance is only to call to mind the history of such a person & his sufferings: that Christ was once put to death in the flesh. An affectionate remembrance is when we so call Christ & his death to our minds as to feel the powerful impressions thereof upon our hearts.

When the Lord's Supper is served we are to experience an affectionate remembrance because the gospel is recalled & reapplied. We remember the grace purchased at Christ's death is the same grace we need when we come to the table.

Being married now almost 32 years, I know the importance of remembering my wedding anniversary. I know that if I do nothing for Muriel & only mentally acknowledge our anniversary, I'm in trouble. She wouldn't say, *How thoughtful! I'm glad you didn't forget.* You don't remember your anniversary by stating the facts. She expects that the concept of remembering our anniversary involves a layer of activity, at the very least a card with a note. I remember our anniversary as I pursue, cherish, & love her daily like I vowed on our wedding day.

That's how we're to remember Jesus, who He is & what He's done. As you know, the gospel is believed once for salvation but is reapplied daily. It isn't one-and-done but rinse & repeat. Every time we take communion the gospel is proclaimed, & we believe & embrace it again; in other words, we remember. It's my prayer that we come to the Lord's Table today with eagerness & expectancy, believing this isn't a dull religious ceremony but a spiritual gospel experience.¹⁰

PRAY & PASS

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; & when He had given thanks, He broke it & said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

We eat of the bread remembering our Savior & the good news of His death & resurrection.

In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread & drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

We drink of the cup remembering our Savior & His grace in giving us salvation through His death & resurrection.

¹⁰ Dustin Crowe, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-does-it-mean-to-remember-jesus-in-the-lords-supper