

Introduction

1. In our passage today Paul begins the conclusion to his letter
2. In the final chapter and a half, he...
 - a. Reflects on his ministry
 - b. Asks his readers to pray for him
 - c. Greeted a number of the recipients of the letter by name
 - d. Warns his readers about false teachers
 - e. And finally sends greetings to his readers from some of his traveling companions
3. Today we will focus on vs. 14-21 where Paul reflects on his ministry
4. There are four things I would like to highlight as he does this

A. Paul was passionate about exhorting his fellow Christians, even the mature ones (15:14-15a)

1. Paul was convinced that the recipients of his letter were able to admonish one another (14):
 - a. They were **“full of goodness”**:
 - 1) The word goodness refers to having positive moral qualities
 - 2) The fact that Paul refers to them as “full of goodness” means that they were overflowing with Christian moral character
 - 3) It’s interesting to note the difference in both tone and content between this letter and that to the Corinthians:
 - a) Both letters were written to Greco/Roman Gentile believers
 - b) In 1st Corinthians Paul had to address a host of moral issues like lawsuits against one another, sexual immorality, marriage and divorce, adultery, abuse of spiritual gifts, and others
 - c) His letters to the Romans addresses almost none of those issues, but rather focuses almost exclusively on issues related to Christian unity (in the practical application section)
 - d) It appears that while the Corinthians moral character was quite lacking, that of the Romans stood out
 - b. The reason for their moral character was because they were **“filled with all knowledge”**
 - 1) This is actually a perfect participial phrase--**“having been filled with all knowledge”**—which describes why they were of such high moral character
 - 2) Paul uses the Greek word gnosis here which can refer to knowledge, but also to understanding or wisdom
 - 3) In this context, I suspect that Paul is using it to refer more in the second sense—wisdom and/or understanding
 - 4) In other words, their high moral character is a result of their wisdom and understanding of the Gospel and related Christian principles
 - c. As a result, they were **“able also to admonish one another”**
 - 1) This is also a participial phrase but in the present tense—**“being able to admonish one another”**

- 2) In the simplest sense, to admonish means to instruct, teach or counsel, but can also mean to warn
 - 3) So, they were of good moral character because they were filled with wisdom and understanding which enabled them to admonish one another
2. But, even so, Paul still exhorted them (15a): **"But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again,"**
- a. What Paul wrote to the Romans was not new to them—this is clear from both the word **"remind"** and the word **"again"**
 - b. He doesn't identify here what **"some points"** refers to, but we can assume it refers to most, if not all, of what's written in the letter:
 - 1) God's redemptive plan (1-8)
 - 2) God's plans for Israel (9-11)
 - 3) But also the proper response to the Gospel (12-15)
 - c. So, why did Paul feel the need to remind them of these things, especially when he was convinced they were already fairly mature?
 - 1) We find our answer in Colossians 1:28-29: **"We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."**
 - 2) Paul wasn't satisfied with just winning souls to Christ, but rather making disciples who continued to grow and mature in their faith in Christ

B. Paul understood that his ministry was both a gift from God and an offering back to Him (15:15b-16)

1. Paul describes his ministry as an act of God's grace toward him (15b): **"because of the grace that was given me from God, 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles,"**
 - a. Grace is best understood as unmerited favor or kindness that is bestowed upon someone who doesn't deserve or hasn't earned it
 - b. That's the way Paul saw his ministry to the Gentiles—it was an undeserved gift given to him by God: **"For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."** (1 Corinthians 15:9-10)
2. But, he also understood that this gift of ministry was an offering to God as well (16b): **"ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."**
 - a. It's interesting that Paul refers to himself as a priest here rather than a prophet
 - b. A prophet's role was to declare God's truths to the people so we might have expected Paul to refer to himself here as a prophet since he refers to the Gospel
 - c. A priest's role, however, was to represent the people before God and to present the offerings before God
 - d. The phrase **"my offering of the Gentile"** is challenging:
 - 1) First off, **"my"** is supplied by the NASB so the phrase is simply **"offering of the Gentiles"**
 - 2) English translations vary on how they render this:

- a. The genitive could be possessive meaning Paul was referring to the offerings made by the Gentiles to God (this is the way the ESV and Holman render it)
 - b. But it could also be appositive meaning that Paul was referring to the Gentiles themselves being the offering he made back to God
 - c. The fact that Paul refers to himself as a priest suggests he intended the latter—that the Gentiles who were saved as a result of his ministry were his offering back to God
3. All of us would benefit if we understood what Paul understood:
- a. God has given us each gifts and abilities we didn't deserve—this is His grace to us
 - b. Exercising these gifts and abilities is one of our greatest offerings back to God

C. Paul apparently loved to boast—but not about himself or his accomplishments (15:17-19)

1. Paul states that in Jesus Christ he found a reason for boasting (17): **"Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God."**
2. In fact, he wrote that he wouldn't dare to boast of anything except what *Christ had done* through him (18-NET): **"For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in order to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem even as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."**
3. Do you know what a braggart is? It's someone who boasts in himself and his own accomplishments
 - a. "Slick" in high school
 - b. President Trump
4. Paul didn't like bragging about himself:
 - a. He bragged about other believers (2 Corinthians 7:4; 7:14; 8:24; 9:2-3)
 - b. He bragged about his weaknesses (2 Corinthians 11:10, 30; 12:9)
 - c. He bragged about the cross (Galatians 6:14)
 - d. And, here, we see that he only dared to brag about what Jesus Christ had accomplished through him

D. Paul was motivated to go where he saw the greatest need, even when it brought great hardship to himself (15:20-21)

1. When Paul was saved, there were already tens of thousands of Christians living in Jerusalem and the surrounding regions like Judea and Samaria
2. Peter had even taken the Gospel to the gentiles to a small degree
3. Paul was a skilled, well-educated Jewish scholar that easily could have found a place for ministry among them
4. But instead, his desire was to go where there was the greatest need—where no one had preached the Gospel yet (19-20): **"And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; 21 but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."**
5. And, this decision led Paul to a difficult life with a ton of suffering: 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

6. But for Paul it was worth it, so much so that he called on Timothy to follow in his footsteps: 2 Timothy 4:1-8

Conclusion

1. Imagine what the Church might look like if we were all a bit more like Paul
2. How might it look if we were all intent encouraging and exhorting one another to grow and mature in Christ?
3. How might it look if every believer understood that the gifts and abilities they have were given to them by God as a means to serving Him as a form of offering?
4. What if God's people just couldn't stop boasting about Jesus—maybe we'd spend less time boasting about ourselves <grin>
5. What if we were more like Paul and minister regardless of the personal cost and suffering it might bring to us?