***The Uniqueness of the Church Age
RO185-02***

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Please open your Bibles today to Romans 15:14-16. Our subject is "The Authority for Boldness." This is segment number two.

The apostle Paul begins the closing section of his letter in verse 14 – this letter which he is writing to Christians in the city of Rome. He begins this closing section with an expression of his confidence in the Roman believers. Paul has indicated that his strong admonitions previously in this letter, on areas of spiritual weakness among them, does not connote lack of esteem for them. Paul views them as brethren in Christ Jesus, and therefore, he speaks to them as a family member, and not as an enemy.

**Goodness**

Paul expresses a firm personal conviction about the spiritual maturity that he has heard characterizes the Roman Christians. They are, for one thing, he says, "Full of goodness," which connotes a spirit of kindness and conciliation. It refers to an emotional quality, which is to be found in a mature Christian. Goodness is the product, the Bible tells us, of the fruit of the Spirit in a spiritual Christian; that is, one who is filled with the Spirit. Goodness, of course, is the opposite of all the badness that the old sin nature normally puts out.

**Knowledge**

Secondly, Paul says that: "His Roman brethren, he knows, are filled with the knowledge of doctrine." This knowledge refers to doctrinal information which they have in the perceptive capacity of the mentality of their souls. This is information that they have been taught about biblical principles. The Roman Christians knew how to use the grace system of perception in order to develop spiritual maturity in their souls. Positive volition to doctrine in the perceptive mind stores that information in the human spirit, from whence it is cycled up to the directive mentality of the soul in order to guide the Christian in his emotions and in his actions – the expressions of his will.

**Carl Sagan**

Knowledge of doctrine enabled these Roman Christians, furthermore, to be able to evaluate the information and the truth that came to them from all areas of learning in human society, and to be able to discern error. This is just as we today know that when someone as impressive as Carl Sagan, the great astronomer, will stand up, who bears enormous prestige in the scientific world; has great university training; and, is a competent man in the field of astronomy – can stand up and say, "In the beginning was the cosmos, and there was anything but the cosmos, and there never will be anything but the cosmos," we know he's wrong. In the beginning was God, who made the cosmos, and He is the one who is going to continue forever. Therefore, out of that premise of Sagan, he makes the conclusion that evolution is the way all things have come about. And he will look you, through the television tube, straight in the eye, and say to you, as he has done on many occasions, "Evolution is not a theory. It is a scientific fact." Can we stand up against this man with his credentials? You bet we can, because in the Bible we know that God created the universe and all life forms, and that Sagan is wrong.

This was the great thing Paul said about the Christians in Rome: "Because you have knowledge of doctrinal principles, nobody can intimidate you. The Roman government can declare that it is supreme, and that it can make the decisions for your lives (and those are absolute), but you turn around and say, "No, no. We have a basis upon which we can judge the emperor himself as to whether he is right or wrong. We have the Bible, the information of doctrine, by which to judge and make that decision.

So, Paul says, "I have great respect for you Roman Christians. You are people who are obviously, on the whole, filled with the Spirit of God, and therefore you are exuding goodness. You are people who have knowledge of doctrine, and therefore you are capable of living your lives effectively for God's glory." These Christians, because they were filled with goodness, and because they had doctrinal understanding, were furthermore qualified, Paul said, to admonish each other spiritually. They can give each other godly divine viewpoint advice when it is needed. This, I have pointed out to you before, is true Christian counseling, by which we can guide our emotional and mental stability.

The local church should be filled with such spiritually mature believers, and when it is, as the result of the pastor-teacher doing his job, and people responding to the doctrinal information – when that condition exists, then you have a happy situation where the local church is a mutual aid and improvement society.

Beginning at Romans 15:15, the apostle Paul expresses the ground of this great boldness with which he has spoken to them in this letter, because he has taken them to task at certain points about certain things they were doing which were out of line. Remember that he's never met them. He's never to Rome. This is information that has come to them through his agents, and which he knows to be reliable. So, he has a basis for speaking to them and saying, "You do know a lot. Somebody has taught you a lot of doctrine, but you're not finished, because now I have come on the scene, and you are obliged to listen to me, the apostle Paul, because I have an authority, and I have credentials, and I have something to bring you to finish up what you have thus far to fill it out and to complete that knowledge and your grasp upon your walk with God." Now, where does he get off talking to them like that?

**Paul's Boldness**

So, in verse 15-16, he proceeds to give the basis for his boldness. He says, in verse 15, "But I have written boldly." Paul has written some in-depth instruction on various subjects, in spite of his appreciation for their knowledge of doctrine. He does not imply that they are doctrinally untaught, but he does imply that they are doctrinally incomplete. This word "but" that he begins with is the Greek preposition "de." It indicates that in spite of their competence in doctrine, they still needed some instruction from the apostle Paul. And Paul says, "I am going to speak to you very boldly." This is the Greek word "tolmeroteron." "Tolmeroteron" means "frankly." This word stands first in the Greek sentence.

So, when you start reading verse 15 in the Greek, the first thing that hits you in the Greek is "tolmeroteron," which means "very boldly; very frankly; and, putting it up front, I have something to say to you." So, they know that the apostle Paul, at this point in time, is not going to hold back anything from them for fear of offending somebody in the Roman church. He says, "I'm going to do this on certain points. And I have spoken to you boldly on certain points in this letter.

For example, he senses a little bit of arrogance on the part of these Roman Christians, who are basically mostly gentiles. And he senses a little bit of arrogance on their part because they looked down upon the Jews who were under God's divine discipline. So, in Romans 11, he reminds them that the Jew has a very great future, and that those gentiles are only in the place of superior blessing because the grace of God has put them in the tree of blessing that (temporarily) God has broken off the branch of Israel. So, Paul in that point says, "Be careful that you do not think more highly of yourself. You are favored by God. But his Jewish people have not been cast aside."

Then, in Romans 12:3, he reminds them about personal pride in their service to God – that they need to be aware of something that has been brought to his attention – that they have been given great opportunity. And some of them are in very great prominence. And he says, "None of you should think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but everybody should appreciate the fact that God has given you a spiritual gift. You work with that gift. You need to perform it in the local church so that everybody else is blessed by your effort." And he said, "Don't be so arrogant as to think that, because maybe your gift is more prominent than someone else's, that you are something special."

Furthermore, in Romans 13:3, for example, he warns them about having a bad attitude toward government and government rulers, but to realize that the whole institution of government is a divine institution that God has provided to keep Satan from being able to rip apart human society until the Lord returns.

Then in Romans 13:13-14, he goes into great detail about moral purity that should characterize a Christian. He has gotten some bad vibrations back from Rome, through some of his associates, that some of the Roman Christians are not exactly clean-cut in their lives. So, he's taken them to task about that issue. So, this is the sort of thing that he's talking about when he says, in verse 15, "Now, I've been very frank with you, and I've put it up front, and I've spoken to you boldly on certain points – things like this, and many others."

However, he says, "I've done this so as to remind you again." The Greek word "to remind you again" is a very emphatic word. It is a word that's important because it establishes a basic spiritual principle that all of you, who are engaged in God's service in any kind of ministry, need to remember: "epanamimnasko." "Ep" is a preposition. "Ana" is a preposition. "Mimnasko" is the word "to remember," or "to put in mind." When you throw two prepositions in front of it, that means really, really emphatically again hitting hard to put again and again and again. The word "ana" means "again." The word "epi" means "upon:" "to put upon you again and again and again" – a reminder of doctrine.

So, don't get all out of shape if you hear a teacher of the Word of God telling you something you've heard before; that he is teaching you something that he has taught you before; or, that he is perhaps casting something in another context, or bringing it back into your focus at some particular point of a study of the Word of God. We all need to be put in mind again and again of basic doctrinal principles. And this word is an emphatic word to remind us that we need that.

**The Church vs. Israel**

Paul says, "I have spoken to boldly, simply by way of a reminder of doctrinal principles that you already may know. This whole letter is a bold declaration of church-age truth by Christians who must live by church-age doctrine, and not by Judaism and the principles of the Old Testament. Please remember that one of the great, great tragedies of the Reformation was that the reformers did not distinguish between Israel and the church. They thought that the church was the blossom that grew out of the stock of Israel, and the two were connected – and they were not. They never understood that God took a big ax, and He chopped off Judaism at a certain point in time, and simply pushed it aside. And then He began a totally new plant, which is the church age.

**The Apostle Paul**

The apostle Paul is *the* teacher, and is *the* New Testament church leader to whom the full gamut of doctrinal truth pertinent to the church was given. That's why it's very important what he has written. That's why it is very important for churches to specialize in the teachings of the New Testament epistles. If you are attending a church, or if you hear of a church, where what they hit is the gospels all the time, you know that something is out of kilter. You should be very suspicious. You should understand that that church does not understand that in the gospels you do not find church-age truth. You find spiritual principles. You find about the life of Christ. You get the background. But church-age truth is found through the revelation of the apostle Paul.

So, Paul here is saying, "I'm reminding you of things you know," but, of course, he was also telling them of things that they had not previously heard. Christians who are spiritually mature, and who are filled with goodness and knowledge of doctrine, are always receptive to both frank spiritual instruction, and to more instruction. The Christian who has that kind of receptivity is not going to sit in a congregation and misunderstand what the preacher says, nor have their feelings hurt because he refers to something that touches them.

It is amazing how often God the Holy Spirit rams something home that is said from the pulpit to a person who is sitting there listening. He rams it home to that person's mind because it is pertinent to their situation – something that they need to deal with in their life, and correct spiritually. And it is amazing how Satan comes around the other side and says, "You see, he's talking about you." Would you like to raise your hand if you ever sat there and thought I was talking about you? I couldn't be less interested in talking about you. I'm very much interested in talking about the Lord and the Word of God. But you are very poor subjects for anybody to talk about, except in your own eyes.

So, God the Holy Spirit may say, "Here it is, friend. Bingo! Boy, this is it." People sometimes come up, and they talk to me about things, and all of a sudden I get the drift that they think I know something. And they don't even tell me what they're talking about. And pretty soon I know that they think somebody has told me something, and I don't know anything from up or down. So, I have to play dumb, and look wise (and I'm good at both of those things), even though I know nothing until I find out what's going on.

Well, we're talking about a mature Christian, and this is what Paul says. Paul is saying, "I hope you folks aren't going to have your feelings hurt, and be indignant about the fact that I'm coming through instructing you, and I have told you some very forceful, straightforward things, and that you will accept that in the spirit in which I am speaking to you as a brother in the family, and not as an enemy.

A pastor-teacher will, sooner or later, find that he cannot speak clearly and frankly to many Christians on doctrinal issues if they are spiritually immature hotheads. What they do is shove off. And you can list a long string of people within the within the context of the Berean ministry (those of you who've been around here for some years), knowing of hotheads who shoved off because they were confronted by an issue of their personal lives, and their personal conduct, and their personal opinions that needed to be realigned with the Word of God. Nobody was forcing them to realign, but they were very uncomfortable about not being realigned. They hang around for a while. They're out of the will of God. They're out of the practice of biblical Christianity. Sometimes they gut it out for a while. But I know that, sooner or later, that person is going to evaporate. Either they will conform to the Word of God, or they will move off, and they will be the poorer for it.

**Repetition of Teaching**

The mature Christian values very much what this word represents in the Greek Bible: being reminded intensely again and again of the principles of doctrinal truth. Periodic repetition of a doctrine obviously helps to seal it in our understanding, and to incorporate it in our practice.

Where does Paul get off talking like this? He says, "I do this because of something." Because of what? Because of what he calls "grace" ("charis"). This is the word, as you know, that refers to divine favor which is given as a gift from God. It cannot be earned. It is a special blessing in some respect, Paul says, upon him, in reference to his bold speaking to the Roman Christians. He says that this is a special grace which has been given to him. The word "given" is the Greek word "didomi." This word means to receive something. Here, Paul is referring to his apostleship. It's in the Greek aorist tense, which means that it was given to him at the point of his salvation, because all of our spiritual gifts (our spiritual abilities) are given to us at the point of our salvation. Nobody gets the gift of apostle today, because that gift has been phased out. To be an apostle, you had to be one who had seen Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead. And, of course, we have nobody around to see Christ resurrected from the dead. So, we have no apostles.

When the Pope very impressively declares his apostolic authority, you know that that's bunko. He has no apostolic authority. And when he lays his hands upon the heads of his priests and says, "I impart to you apostolic authority," that bunko. None of them have seen Christ resurrected. They are not apostles. They do not carry that authority, even though they pretend to carry that authority.

What Paul is referring to here is something that, at the point of his salvation in the past, came to him. It's passive voice, which tells us that Paul didn't take it. You cannot take any spiritual gift. You cannot pray for God to give you any spiritual gift. The Bible is very clear that God the Holy Spirit sovereignly decides what He's going to give each one of us. And He says, "Here is the ability with which you are to serve Me in the body of Christ." It's a participle. It's a spiritual principle, clearly stated – that Paul, by God's grace, received something. And what is that?

He received, by God's grace, the authority to be a minister of God. This is a significant word also in the Greek Bible. He was given the role of a minister. It's "leitourgos." In the classical Greek language, this word "leitourgos" was used of somebody who performed a public service at his own expense, and therefore he was referred to as a "leitourgos," or "a public servant." Paul is acting as a spiritual servant to the Roman Christians at his own expense. So, the word "leitourgos," under the handling of a God the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, came to have a sacred meaning – "somebody who performs a sacred duty at his own expense." The apostle Paul was a minister with the gift and the authority of an apostle. This is clearly stated in Romans 1:5 and in Romans 11:13. He does have the gift and the authority of an apostle.

Also, Paul is acting as a spiritual servant to the Roman Christians in this capacity. Hebrews 10:11 uses this word of a priest's service – that a priest standing before the altar, serving God is a "leitourgos," which gives us exactly the picture we have of the apostle Paul: "And every priest stands daily, ministering, offering time and time again the same sacrifice which can never take away sins." We are talking about the word "ministering:" "Every priest stands daily as a 'leitourgos,'" (as a sacred servant), offering time after time the same sacrifice."

So, this word that the apostle Paul uses here refers to someone who is performing a public sacred service. He says that he is: "A public servant (a sacred servant) by the grace of God of the Lord Jesus Christ." He has been made a minister, in verse 16, of Christ Jesus to the gentiles (the "ethnos"). The "ethnos" is a word that refers to all non-Jews. Paul is a priest for these gentiles. When he says that he is a priest, he is a priest, of course, ministering to them in some way. He is not a priest for them privately, because, in the church age, all Christians act as their own priests before God. Nevertheless, Paul says, "I have been called by God, by a special act of His grace, to become a sacred minister, an officer of Christ Jesus to the gentile world. The gentiles are the special area of Paul's responsibility.

This is shown to us, for example, in Acts 9:15-16: "But the Lord said to him (to Ananias, concerning Paul), 'Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name's sake." So, the apostle Paul, at the point of his salvation on the Damascus Road, was clearly informed that he was going to be a special agent of God as a minister to the gentiles.

In Galatians 2:7-9 Paul says, "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised (which is the 'ethnos' – the gentiles, just as Peter had been to the circumcised." It was well known in the New Testament church that Peter was the special apostle to the Jews; and, Paul, the special apostle to the gentiles: "For He (that is, God), Who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised, effectually work for me also (in Paul's apostleship) to the gentiles. And recognizing the grace that had given to me, James and Cephas and John, who are reputed to be the pillars of the church that is in Jerusalem, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the gentiles, and they to the circumcised."

So, it was clearly understood that Paul, in the New Testament church, was the par excellence apostle to the gentiles. He had, of course, this great authority from God in his ministry that enabled him to have direct communication with God. Thus he was able to deliver true church doctrine which was not to be found in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul could really say, "The Lord said to me." People today cannot really say that unless they are quoting Scripture. If you are quoting Scripture, then the Lord has said something to you. But the charismatics love to go around saying, "God said to me." And then they tell us what they wish God had said to them, and what they would like us to think that God has said to them.

The apostle Paul had the authority of direct communication with God. So, his teaching ministry actually contained what God had revealed to him. It is the mind of God being delivered to the mind of man. And that's a very heady ability. An apostle, therefore, must not be ignored. He cannot be resented. He is not presenting his own opinions. The apostle Paul was not an apostle because he was some kind of a worthy, special person. And he wants to make that clear – that he was an apostle because he has been graced by God who chose him, and then proceeded to teach him church-age truth.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, the apostle makes that clear when he says, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 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." Paul said, "I certainly never deserved to be an apostle. I was the least worthy. I went around murdering and killing Christians before I was saved – hardly a candidate for apostleship. But it is very clear that God, in His grace, has forgiven me, and as always, when God forgives, you're background is wiped out, and now God deals with me as one who is as perfect as Christ. And He's made me an apostle."

Paul says, "When he did that, I showed my appreciation by knocking myself out in my ministry as an apostle. Once I knew what my gift was, nothing could hold me back. Once I knew what my gift was, I refused to ever get entangled with all the things of life that keep me from serving God with my gift, and from ever being on the scene among God's people in local church ministries, ministering my gift, as they minister their gifts to me."

So, Paul writes to these Roman Christians, he wants to make it clear, on the basis of his apostolic authority – Christians whom he has never met. Paul, by God's appointment, of course, has an obligation to do this. He has an obligation to explain the Word of God to gentiles everywhere. In Acts 20:22, he refers to this. The background here is that the apostle Paul is going to go from Miletus, which is a sea port, and he's going to board ship, and he's going to Jerusalem. Some very severe, traumatic trials await him in Jerusalem. Before he's through, he'll have four years taken out of his life in imprisonment. But he has gathered all the local pastor-teachers from all over the house churches that resided in the city of epistles, and he's met them down there at the dock, and they stand together there at the point of departure on the beach, and he is talking to them. And it is at this point that the apostle Paul said to them: "And now behold, bound in spirit (that is, the human spirit, under a sense of some great tragedy awaiting him – something ominous in his own spirit), I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there." Well, he's going to cause a riot, and he's going to be taken into custody by the Roman authorities:

"Except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and affliction await me." Here, he says, "God spoke to me." The Holy Spirit said, "I want you to take this trip, but I want you to know when you get to Jerusalem, that they're going to really zero in on you, and you are going to start a section of real suffering as you have never had before."

So, what's his reaction> Verse 24 says, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course in the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." Now, that is real gutsy Christianity: "I am an apostle. I have great authority. I can walk into any church in the New Testament, and I can tell them how to chew the cabbage. I can tell them what they may do, and what they may not do. I am above the local pastor-teacher. I have a supreme authority from God. I can tell them the mind of God, because I have direct communication with God. And I'm not going to let anything stand in the way of my delivering doctrinal information to the people of God, if it costs me my life in the process of doing it."

This man understood his gift, and he understood the urgency of exercising that gift. And even when God said, "You're headed for some hard times," Paul said, "That's all right with me. I'm going to do the best I can. But I'm going to keep telling people what they need to know as Christians in the church age. God did not make me an apostle because I deserved it." Paul says, "But now that I have it, I'll be faithful to my calling."

**The Uniqueness of the Church Age**

So, Paul did have a unique understanding of doctrine relating to the church, which these gentiles needed to know. He understood the doctrine of the grace age, from the point of salvation, through rewards in heaven, and he got that in a very distinctive way. I reiterate again, that he didn't find it in the Old Testament. The church was never discussed in the Old Testament. Its grace-age doctrines and the unique relationships were never referred to in the Old Testament. No Jew would have ever dared to dream that the third Person of the Trinity would make His body His temple, and live with him permanently, as all of you people sit here as Christians with God the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. No Jew would have thought that. That was unthinkable in the Old Testament. It was a distinct church-age revelation. No Jew would have dared to think of walking before God, and talking to Him as a priest, as if he was his own priest. It was only in the church-age that every believer was made his own priest before God. No believers of the Old Testament ever would have ever dared to anticipate the power of God that he had within him because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The whole picture is totally different. And the apostle Paul, therefore, had to find this information from someplace outside of the Old Testament.

In Galatians 1:10-17, he tells us where he got his information, and why he has this kind of authority. He is not just acting like some high-powered, religious leader who is trying to make a name for himself. In Galatians 1:10, Paul says, "For am I now seeking the favor of men or of God, or am I striving to please men?" Now, you must understand that the background of the book of Galatians was written because Paul had ministered to the churches in Galatia; he had found the churches; he had taught them the grace of God; and, right after him came legalizers – Jews who did not like the concept that Israel had been set aside; and that the church age was totally separate from the teachings of Judaism; that God's grace was distributed to Christians as it had never been distributed to the Jews; and, that Christians had relationships eternally to God that that the Jews never even dreamed of.

So, these Jews came along, and some of them were Christians, and they said, "Hey, if you have a little male baby, and he is not circumcised on the eighth day, he's not going to heaven." And Paul said, "What a bunch of butchers. They don't have the foggiest notion of how a person is saved. Even in the Old Testament, your circumcision didn't save you. It was simply a sign of God removing the sin nature's flesh power to those who were trusting in God like Abraham did, to bring the Savior in the future to save you." Paul said, "These people have got this thing all balled up. They're like yappin' dogs snarling at the heels of grace teachers." And to compare them to dogs was a big insult, because dogs in the New Testament were roaming scavengers. They were looked down upon. They were not the nice household pets that we have today.

So, the apostle here has to establish the fact that he knows what he's talking about on a proper authority, because unfortunately, the Galatians Christians went with that teaching. They went back to the Old Testament. They were hanging in there just like the reformers did. They were mixing the law and grace. They were undermining their grace status. They were diluting their Christian freedom in Christ. They were burdening themselves with all the Old Testament ritual. And Paul says, "You people must have lost your minds. There are 613 regulations in the Old Testament, and none of our fathers have ever been able to keep them, or have ever been able to live under them. And here you come along, but God's grace has wiped all that out." The Holy Spirit says, "I'm going to do it for you. You are going to act like royalty, because I'm going to make you act like royalty. I'm going to give you the capacity to be really fine people. And what do you do? You come in after me. Christians are elated. They're moving on with the Lord and you tear them back down to groveling around with those old legalistic systems that never did anybody any good but to destroy them, and to show what sinful people they were."

**The Grace Gospel**

So, Paul says, "Why have I spoken to you and ministered? Because I want you to like me?" God help the preacher who wants to be liked by his congregation: "For am I now seeking the favor of man, or am I seeking the favor of God? Or am I striving to please man? If I were still trying to please men (like he was when he was killing Christians), I would not be a bondslave of Jesus Christ." He says, "I'm a slave now, and I'm a slave of the living God, and I'm not trying to do my own thing:" "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man." People did not invent the gospel of the grace of God.

Anytime you ask an unsaved person how to go to heaven, he does not come up with the grace method. He always comes up with a: "Gee, I have to be real good. I have to have more good stuff than bad stuff in my life." It's all his human efforts. Anytime man makes a grace salvation, it's his own efforts to make it.

Verse 12 says, "For I neither received it (the grace salvation gospel) from man, nor was I taught it. But I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Now, isn't that great? He said, "I didn't even get the information of the gospel of the grace of God, in all of its magnificent impact, from the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. I got it right directly from Jesus Christ:" "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism – how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and I tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries, among my countrymen – being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when He Who had set me apart."

**Election**

Ah, here is the election of God, which is why every one of us is in this auditorium is a saved person here. Paul says, "But when God Who chose me (for I don't know why), even from my mother's womb." Isn't that interesting? Paul was just a glob of flesh. He was a glob of nothing. He was a fetus. His mother went around saying, "I'm going to have a fetus." No, his mother said, "I'm going to have a baby," because he was a human being with a soul, and a destiny already to be the great apostle to the gentiles. Isn't that interesting?

**Abortion**

Here you have a little insert of information that condemns abortion. Abortion is murder of a human being for whom God has a plan and a destiny both in time and eternity. The only good thing that I suppose you can say about abortion is that the infants who are so slaughtered by their ungodly, unregenerate mothers at least will be in heaven, while their mothers will be in the lake of fire.

"But even He Who he who had set me apart from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the gentiles. I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. (I didn't consort with the leaders in Jerusalem.) Nor did I go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before me. But I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas (that is, Peter) and stayed with him 15 days." Isn't this amazing? Paul says, "Right after I was saved, I understood that God had great mission for me. He told me that I was going to be His representative to the whole gentile world, and that I needed to have information of a message that now pertained to gentile blessing as members of the new body of Christ known as the church.

"So, what does God do? He doesn't send me to Jerusalem to talk to Peter, because Peter doesn't know anything about church doctrine hardly. He doesn't send me to James, the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, because he didn't know hardly anything about church doctrine. Instead, Jesus speaks to me and says, 'I want you to set up your residence out here in the desert in Arabia. I want you to get away from everybody and everything. And I want you to be ready for class tomorrow morning at 9 A.M. And we are going to sit down, and we are going to have daily class sessions for the next three years while I teach you the full gamut and the full details of church truth, because it's not in the Old Testament. And for you to understand the doctrines of the royal family of God, I'm going to have to teach them to you personally. And then I'm going to lead you to write letters that will crystallize and condense this material in its essential form for believers down through the centuries.'"

Now, the apostle Paul comes with a lot of credentials. He knows what he's talking about. And he's making all this known to these Romans Christians in one way or another, so that they're not resentful of the fact that they have spoken to him forthrightly in this way. That is because what the apostle Paul had to teach them was going to transform them into their destiny of being priests of God and members of the royal family of the church age. Paul's devotion to his apostolic calling was demonstrated many times, including by his willingness to continue in that service under great hardships and under great limitations.

In 2 Corinthians 11:16-30, you can read about the hardships he suffered; how he was abused; how he didn't have money; how he didn't have food; how he didn't have warmth; and, how he didn't have clothing. And when he didn't feel too well, he had to keep rolling. And he had all these burdens of the Christians in other churches, and what they were doing. It wasn't fun being an apostle in Paul's ministry. He wasn't just being brought in for some great rallies, and being housed in some nice hotel down the road. It was a tough ministry. Many times he did not have, as he indicated, the money to carry on, and he had to work at a job himself to finance his own ministry.

In 2 Timothy 4:16-18, the apostle Paul even added another discouragement that he had to work under, and to keep faithfully ministering to these gentile believers, because he describes what happened the first time he was brought before Nero. At the end of that four years of imprisonment, he finally got before Nero to hear his case. When Nero finally heard his case, he was acquitted. He was judged innocent, and he was he was released. And he had a period of time that he got as far as Spain with further missionary work, and then was imprisoned a second time – this time, under Nero's administration, he was condemned to death.

So, Paul is talking about all this time, two years in Rome while his case is going through the courts and the process, and getting ready to have his day in court. And some of the Christians are shying away from him. They don't want to get too closely associated with him if he's going to be condemned by Nero, even though he is the great apostle to the gentiles (the great man of God), that has brought them the great insights of the church age. Now, that gets discouraging. He's sitting there in prison, chained 24 hours a day to a Praetorian Guard soldier, the elite soldiers of the emperors.

So, here in 2 Timothy 4:16, this is a book which is the last book he wrote, telling Timothy goodbye: "I'm back in prison, and this time I'm not going to be released. The Lord again has spoken to me, and said, 'This time, I'm going to take you home to heaven." And indeed, he was beheaded very shortly after this.

Paul said, "But at my first offense (the first time I was in prison), no one supported me. They all deserted me. May not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me." That's what makes a Christian go. A Christian stays in there. While people desert, the Father in heaven does not desert: "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, in order that, through me, the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the lion's mouth." He says, "They didn't throw me into the Coliseum to be eaten by lions: "God preserved me. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

The apostle Paul here is indicating that it was discouraging when other Christians did not stand by to help him as that splendid man, Epaphroditus did, for example, did when he came from the church at Philippi with an offering to help Paul in Rome. People did not stand by, but he said. "The Lord stood by me, and He has preserved me the first time from being executed. And He's going to continue to preserve me from every evil deed until He is through with me. Then He will take me home to heaven, and here, Paul in the end of the 18th verse is really saying, "So, what? I die. What's so bad? To die is to be with the Lord. And that," he says elsewhere, is indeed much better."

Furthermore, the apostle Paul did not, as you might suspect, get rich in his teaching ministry. He often indeed had to pay his own way. He had the great honor of being an apostle; he had great authority; and, he had direct communication with God. And sometimes, Christians really rally to assist him, like the poor Christians of Macedonia did when he was trying to collect some financial help for the Christians in Jerusalem who suffered a famine. But often, the Christians were going about the good life – those who were prosperous. And they did not think about how Paul could keep doing the things he does out in the field.

In Acts 20:33, the apostle Paul says, "I have coveted no one's silver or clothes." Now, he's still talking here, in Acts 20, to the pastor-teachers of the city of Ephesus. On the beach, he says, "You know that I haven't gone after your money."

Verse 34 says, "As you yourself know that these hands ministered to my own needs. I work with my own hands (earned the money I needed) on occasion, and to the men who were with me (I earned the money that my associates needed to help me in the work). We paid our way. We didn't get it out of you Christians here in Ephesus. In everything I showed you that, by working hard in this manner, you must help the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus." Would to God that Christians could remember these words indeed: "The words of the Lord Jesus that He Himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" It is more blessed to give, than to receive, and to keep piling it up. There comes a time when piling it up is out of line when it is needed. And that time is now, if ever before, in the history of Christendom.

The apostle Paul obviously did not get rich in his ministry. In 2 Corinthians 12, it is important for us to understand this, and I'm saying this today because there is a doctrine which is being promulgated by the charismatics among the ministers that if your congregation does not see you living the best kind of life imaginable, and if your congregation does not see you wearing the best kind of clothes; living in the most majestic, luxurious kind of house; and, driving the finest kind of car and if your congregation does not see you being blessed by God in that material way, then you are not God's spokesman. This, of course, is a justification for the charismatic preachers to live high on the hog.

The apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12:11, had a different perspective. Paul says, "Now I have become foolish." He says, "I'm going to be a little silly in the way I'm going to talk to you," because these Corinthian Christians were also very abusive of Paul, in spite of what he had done for them: "You yourselves compelled me to talk this foolishly now. Actually, I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody?" Paul says, "You treat me like a nobody, but I am among the most eminent of the apostles. I am the distinctive apostle to the gentile world. I had private instruction from Jesus Christ. None of the apostles was more eminent than I." Now Paul says, "That's dumb and stupid for me to say that. But at least I need to tell you that, because you don't seem to understand the basis of authority upon which I speak to you. And I do not say this out of pride," Paul was implying, "but I think you need that information.

Verse 12 says, "I confirmed this. God confirmed my authority as an apostle. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you, with all perseverance by signs and wonders in miracles." If you really had an apostolic gift, you could perform miracles, including raising people from the dead; healing people; speaking in foreign languages; and, the whole bit. Paul says, "I demonstrated those to you many times:" "For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches? In what way do you in Corinth who are now abusing me?" And they were very abusive of Paul. They were a very arrogant church, because the city of Corinth was the good-time city of the ancient world. And these Christians could not help carrying over, in that good-time atmosphere in which they lived.

Paul says, "How were you treated inferior because I sat you down and taught you doctrine, and oriented you to the church-age truth that's going to make you eternally wealthy in heaven? How are you inferior to the rest of church churches, except that I did not become a burden to you?" How are you different, except that I didn't use your money? I didn't take your salary. I didn't cause you to have to pay for me and my evangelistic group. And the years (the time) that we would spend with you, we financed ourselves. That's how you are inferior to other churches."

This is sarcasm, folks. And then he picks up a line from Steve Martin. He says, "Forgive me this wrong. Well, *excuse me* for not taking your money, and not burdening you, and making our own way, so that all you got was the benefits. Here, for this third time, I'm ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden to you. So, don't make any preparations at Motel 6 for me. For I do not seek what is yours, for children are not responsible to say that for their parents, but parents are to save up for their children. And I will most likely spend and be expended for your souls," including his life: "If I love you more, am I to be loved less in return? But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself. Nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you by deceit. Certainly, I have not taking advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?"

Paul says, "Even my workers did not get rich off of you. I urged Titus to go, and sent the brothers with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same Spirit, and walk in the same steps? All the time, you've been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we've been speaking in Christ, and all for your up-building, beloved." Paul says, "I don't have to prove myself or defend myself to you in that congregation. I say these things so you know what I'm saying before God. And if you have any sense, you know that I wouldn't have the gall to speak this about myself in the presence of God, Who will judge those who lie in this way."

"For I am afraid that perhaps when I come, I may find you to be not what I wish, and may be found by you to be not what you wish – that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, anger, tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, or disturbances. I am afraid that when I come again, my God may humiliate me before you. And I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past, and not repented of the impurity, immorality, and sensuality which they have practiced." Paul says, "I hate to think of what I'm going to find when I finally come to visit with you – the kinds of lives that you may still be living."

So, the apostle Paul was very explicit and very clear that he comes as an apostle; he came with great authority; and, he ministered to them on the basis of his own efforts. Clearly, the apostle Paul was not like the charismatic preachers today, and the TV evangelists, who live the good life at the expense of the congregation – the money that they send in to them, and try to argue that God's messengers are always going to be prosperous.

There was one thing the Paul could say at the end of his life that these characters will not be able to say. And that was that he was true to his divine calling as a minister of the doctrine of the church-age to the gentiles. And for that, Paul said, "I do anticipate great rewards in heaven for my faithfulness. I did the job that I was called to do."

He says this in that final letter to his friend Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Paul, knowing that he's now going to be executed, said, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offerings." He's making the analogy that his life is going to be poured out like when, sometimes, an offering was made to God – a pouring out of a liquid upon the altar: "And the time of my departure has come." Paul could say, "I have fought the good fight. I finished the course. God's plan of good works for me has been executed. I've kept the faith. I've been true to the doctrine of the church age. In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearance."

Paul says, "I am confident that I will not only have rewards, but that I will receive the special medal-of-honor rewards that are given only to a few – crowns. And I will receive the crown of righteousness because of the life that I have lived in service and devotion to the God who called me from before I was born, while still in my mother's womb, to be the apostle to the gentile world, giving them the doctrines of the church age from salvation by grace to great rewards in heaven."

The apostle Paul is trying to convey to these Romans Christians that, while he has spoken boldly to them on the basis of this grace of apostleship, he did this as the result of one who is authorized by God to do just exactly that. It is tough today to find Christians who will stand in there, faithful to God, serving Him, apart from how they are appreciated, or how responsive people are, knowing that the important thing is that people need to know what God has to say. What they do with it from then on is up to them, as it is, indeed, to all of you.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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