

“Preaching, Planning, Giving, Praying”

True Christianity, like many other things, is as much caught as it is taught. We learn from hearing the truth, but perhaps we learn better from seeing the truth in action. It is fine to read a book about how to do something, but it is far better to have someone else show you as they do it before your eyes.

I know I am gaining every day that I get to work with my dad in the woodshop because I learn by watching and doing rather than simply by being told. Romans 15 is like a brief apprenticeship with Paul the Apostle and Missionary. Here we are allowed to come alongside the great apostle and feel what he feels, see things from his perspective and capture just a little of what it would be like to have been in his company. Here is the real Paul, on display. Let us see what we can pick up!

In these verses of Romans 15 Paul refers to himself by personal pronouns at least 28 times in only 20 verses: “I, me, my.” Except for Chapter 7, Paul does this in no other chapter. This, then, is a *biographical section* where Paul explains his aspirations, goals, hopes and desires as well as requests prayer from the church at Rome. In a letter that is mostly doctrinal and practical, this ending allows us a glimpse into the heart and mind of the man Paul.

I have identified four major themes in these verses, although there is much more than we could draw out from them, if we had the time. They are Preaching, Planning, Giving, and Praying, in that order.

I. PREACHING

verse 15. Paul reminds them that he has written very boldly throughout this book of Romans. He has done so because the grace of God that was given to him to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a faithful minister, He was warning teaching, admonishing the people of that congregation. There is always a tendency for people to desire a minister, who tells them what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear. It may not be comfortable but you do not want to have that kind of minister, nor is that kind of minister of faithful servant of God.

A true minister of God is trying to bring people to know Christ and present them as an offering to God, which would be acceptable through the Holy Spirit. One day we're going to stand before God and the results of our lives is all that we have to bring the King. There is only one life will soon be passed, and only what's done for Christ will last. Paul sees himself like a priest going up before the altar of God and putting on the altar. The entire sacrifice of his life service for him that he is the sum total of all of the people he is led to Christ among the Gentiles and all of the service that he is done for God. In verse 17, he says. Therefore in Christ Jesus, I have found a reason for boasting in things pertaining to God, for I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.

1. Results in God's Work are only what Christ accomplishes through us.

We ourselves can not take responsibility for the results, but only for our faithfulness. We don't boast about what we have done for Christ, but rather what Christ has done through us. Spiritual fruit cannot be manufactured. It has to be borne. We may bear the fruit, but God causes it to happen, just as a tree bears fruit because of the life forces within it. Trees don't manufacture fruit, they bear it.

West- Plex church, is a small church under a hundred right now, and it is our desire to grow. We want to add numbers and to see God's blessing. We must understand though, that that is not within our power. We can plant the seed, we can water the seed, but God has to give the increase. All that Paul could do was be faithful to God. If God would blessed and there were results, then God would get the praise and glory.

How utterly dependent upon God we are! How important it is to go to God in prayer with everything we do!

Church growth has almost become a cult in and of itself. The ultimate goal of the church is not just grow with. It is the praise glory and honor to God the father. Notice Romans 15: 9. The reason Christ has become a servant to Jews as well as Gentiles is so that they may glorify God for his mercy, as the Scriptures predicted. Church growth is not for our benefit, but for God's. We need to keep this in mind in everything that we do, the ultimate goal of our worship, our evangelism, our teaching, everything we do is the glory of God.

2. The gospel is an authoritative message from the King that we are to proclaim.

It has become popular in recent years to talk about sharing the gospel. But the Bible never uses that term. The Bible never says go share the gospel. It says proclaim the Gospel. There is a big difference in a desire not to threaten anyone. We have toned down the message we are just beggars telling other beggars where we got the bread. Not so that's only partially true. We are ambassadors of the King of the universe. We been commissioned with an authoritative message that everywhere is to be proclaimed, whether they like it or not. We proclaim it rather or not they except it our responsibility is to shout out the information, not share it. Do you see the difference? We are like the town crier's who go about the town with a bell in our hand clanging the bell and saying the message. We are not responsible for the reception we get and no matter how we try to cloak it in good terms we must understand that some don't want to hear it. Too bad, they need to hear it! The King has ordered it to be heard, and ordered us to tell them. I fear that too many of us are more afraid of other people than we are of God the King who ordered us to deliver a message.

Have forgotten who we are and what our responsibility is? Paul did not. He says, "I have fully preached the gospel of Christ in the power of the Spirit from Jerusalem to as far as Illyricum. (ill-lear, ree, cum) The Roman Province north of Macedoni [Greece] in

modern Albania and perhaps Montenegro and Bosnia). In Paul's missionary journeys he kept pressing westward across all of Turkey, Greece and even north to Albania.

3. **The goal of the gospel is to proclaim it to every people groups in the world vs. 20**

Paul's goal was to take the gospel like Star Trek "where no man had gone before." This is the missionary mandate given to the whole church through this whole age by Jesus Christ in the Great Commission. It is to take the message of the gospel to every ethnic group. It is not to convert everybody but to make sure that every people group has a viable witness.

This is what we are doing with our support of *brother M* in the Mindinao Strategic Vision. We are supporting someone who is taking the gospel message to a people-group that so far as we know, has never heard! Between the two churches of the Chapel of the Lake and West-Plex Community Church we have a people-group all to ourselves. We are the only supporters in the entire world who are reaching this people group with the gospel. We are their only prayer support too. Our financial and prayer support for this outreach is absolutely CRUCIAL.

In order to carry out the orders of the King, and obey the Great Commission, we must not only preach- proclaim- we must plan. Plans, strategy, objectives, etc are all a vital part of what it takes to carry out Christ's commission.

II. PLANNING

Some people think planning has no place in the work of God. I have known engineers who made their living planning for a company but when it came to the church, thought that human planning, goal setting, strategy, and objectives were not "spiritual." I once preached a sermon showing what a magnificent planner God is! God expects Christians, made in his image, to plan what we do with prayer under the influence of the Spirit. Planning is not unspiritual activity that denies trust in God. In the work of the church, like anything else, "To fail to plan is to plan to fail."

Paul had a definite plan in his missionary work: Always press on to regions beyond that have never heard. It was his strategy that prioritized his life and hindered him from coming to Rome. Since Rome had been reached by others, Paul did not go there first. (22). Now having completed evangelizing the areas around Greece. He was free to fulfill his desire to go to Rome (23). But keeping to his strategy. He was only going to stop by Rome on his way to regions. He had never yet been to specifically, Spain. Whenever I go to Spain. I hope to see you in passing and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while. His strategy it will take him to Spain, but he has time to stop on the way and visit in Rome at least, that is his plan. Yet something has interfered with his plan or strategy before he can go to Spain. He needs to take the contribution from all of the churches of the Gentiles back to Jerusalem where it will be received as an offering to the people of Jerusalem to the Jews.

There is a definite observable priority, in Paul's work planning you see is not unspiritual, but neither is planning the final word. Man Proposes, God disposes. We make our plans, but God determines the outcome. Paul's plans are to come to Spain by way of Rome when he is finished delivering the money to Jerusalem. Verse 28. Did that happen?

Paul certainly delivered the money to Jerusalem. But while in Jerusalem, he was arrested and imprisoned for two years in Caesarea on the coast. That wasn't in his plans but it was in God's plans. Finally when he came to roll. It was in a ship bound as a prisoner appealing to Caesar. He did arrive in Rome, but not the way you planned. Does that mean planning was wrong? No, but the plans we make are not final. We need to accept God's sovereign direction of our lives, but that does not mean we do not plan. We plan at all our plans are contingent on God's will. Paul indicates that in verse 32 when he says, **“So that I may come to you enjoy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.” If it is God's will and only if it's God's will, we'll Paul come**

III. GIVING

Those who benefit spiritually are indebted to minister materially to those who help them.

Now, these verses also suggest a third principle, as they discuss the subject of giving. Those who benefit spiritually are indebted to minister materially to those who help them. The gospel first came to Israel, to the Jews, and then it went to the Gentiles. Paulo agree, has taken the gospel to the Gentiles. Now because of persecution and other economic conditions. The Jews in Jerusalem are suffering and starvation. Paul gathers money from all of his Gentile churches to carry back to feed the Christians of Jerusalem, who first brought the gospel to them. Paul sees this as a natural return of and on investment. Just as the Jewish Christians have shared the gospel spiritual things with Gentiles so the Gentiles who have material goods should share them with the Jews who are poor. It's the principle of reciprocity. This is one of the great acts of relief in the first century. It also created unity in the church that was normally divided along Gentile and on along racial lines. Remember there was a tremendous amount of animosity from Jew and Gentile toward each other in the first century Roman world. Paul sees his ministry, providing healing and reconciliation. Therefore he considers it a priority.

This principle of reciprocity occurs elsewhere in the New Testament. In Galatians Chapter 6: 6 Paul writes, and let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him, who teaches. From this and many other texts in the New Testament. We learned that ministers of the Gospel who give their time to God's Word are to be recompensed materially. Sometimes the apostle Paul did not except that on the mission field, but it is the standard that Jesus has set for his church. The laborer is worthy of his higher, as his principal evidence that if we receive spiritual benefit from those who teach and shepherd us. We are to provide for their material well-being, and this is taught in first Thessalonians 5: 12 and first Corinthians 1:11, 13, 14. It's one of the reasons that the church takes an offering and one of the important reasons that Christians give it is not the only one our support or giving goes not only to support the church and the ministers. But to reach out in missions and to meet the needs of the poor.

Finally we come to the fourth principle, the principle of prayer Paul closes the epistle with a reference and a request for prayer.

IV. PRAYING the power of God is unleashed by prayer.

Paul saves the best for last. It has been said, an Army moves on its stomach, but the church moves on its knees. Without prayer, all the giving all the planning and all the preaching will be in vain. Paul knows that. So he says. Now, I urge you brethren, via our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, he is asking this church for prayer because he knows that nothing can be accomplished apart from it. God has chosen to bless prayer as the key to success. We have not because we ask not. It is not enough to simply throw a few words to heaven. Notice the words here, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me. Paul is going to pray for himself and he asks that the church pray for him. Real prayer is work. It includes Striving.

Look at the prayer requests Paul makes.

1. Then I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea. Palm had enemies, and he knew it. Many of the Jewish people in Jerusalem, would like to have him killed. He was going back into the hornets nest and he needed prayer is life itself would be threatened. On the way back he was warned that prison awaited him. He simply depended upon prayer to deliver him from the disobedient. That is exactly what our missionary with Mindanao, strategic vision is counting on our prayers to deliver him from those who would like to take his life.
2. He also asks prayer that his service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the Saints. He prays that God will bless these efforts to unite the Gentiles and Jews into one church, and that he'll use this offering is collected to do it.
3. Thirdly, he asks that he may come to Rome in July by the will of God and find refreshing rest in Fellowship in their company. Prayer is the key to our plans to prayer. Our plans are given success.

Was Paul delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea? Yes, and no! Yes-they did not kill him, although they tried. No. They were able to imprison him, and charge him with a capital crime worthy of death. Yet, because of that charge Paul ends up in Rome and the gospel is given to Caesar himself. In his wildest imagination, the apostle Paul could not have planned a way to get the gospel to Caesar any better than that. When it became obvious that God's hand was in it. Paul surrendered to the will of God. Interestingly enough, as a sidelight. It's a good thing for us that Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea four two years because of that we have what are known as the prison epistles. Ephesians Philippians Colossians Philemon. How poor we would be without those for epistles. God had the slope all down and give him plenty of time to write in order for us to have the New Testament!

How is your prayer life? Do you merely say your prayers, or are you striving in prayer? Do we really believe that prayer is the key to success.? If we believe that prayer made

that difference how much more would we pray? If Paul considered prayer such an important issue, should it not be so for us?

In conclusion, we have a message to proclaim until every people group in the world has heard. In order to accomplish the great commission. We have to plan and submit those plans to the ultimate will of God. If the missionary mandate is to be carried out. It will take significant giving on our part for the preaching to take place someone must then someone must be sent. And if someone is sent. Then someone must send them. And to send them takes money and prayer in support. We cannot send them unless we are willing to pray for them. We cannot expect anything to happen of significance unless we are willing to bathe it in prayer. That is the same that truth applies to our local church as much as it does to the missionary in bongo bongo. Jesus said apart from me, you can do nothing. Nothing that lasts, nothing eternal, nothing spiritually significant. Oh yes we can do many things are programs run efficiently. Our offerings tally up our efforts multiply, but nothing eternal a significant will ever be accomplished in less it is Christ who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. I will therefore not boast, about what I have done but rather about what Christ has done through me or what Christ has done through us. To him be all the glory now and for ever more. Amen!