

“Staying the Course”  
Romans 15:20-25  
(Preached at Trinity, January 8, 2012)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In this closing portion of the Book of Romans we begin to catch a glimpse into the heart of Paul. He had a passion for Christ and for the work of Christ. He had no confidence in his own abilities but only in the great power of Christ.  
**Romans 15:18 NAU** - " For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me . . . "  
He had many weaknesses and infirmities that other men might have used as reason to excuse themselves from the rigors of Christian service—but this was not Paul.
2. I stressed last time that there were two things that drove Paul to go into the most difficult areas imaginable.
  - A. Because he was convinced of his calling. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles  
**Romans 15:16 NAU** - " to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that *my* offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."  
**Romans 11:13 NAS** - "But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,"
    1. In carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles he was simply fulfilling the fullness of his commission. This led him to many pagan areas of great wickedness, but he did not turn away in fear.
    2. Others were called to build upon the work that others had begun but this was not Paul's calling.
  - B. Second, because Paul was willing to do hard things for Christ
    1. Paul was willing to go where no one else had gone because he wanted to do great things for Christ. He knew that Christ had called him to labor among the Gentiles and no amount of difficulty would keep him from his task.
    2. Paul wasn't afraid to attempt great things because he knew he served a great God. It was a hard labor. It was fearful labor. Laboring among the Gentile nations would bring much difficulty.  
**Matthew Henry** – “He was a bold man that made the first attack upon the palace of the strong man armed in the Gentile world, that first assaulted Satan's interest there, and Paul was that man who ventured the first onset in many places, and suffered greatly for it.”
    3. Paul wanted to do the best for Christ, and no amount of difficulty would hinder him from his task.

3. Paul always had a very keen sense of Divine purpose in his life. He described it in **2 Timothy** as his “course” - δρόμος – it refers to a course that one follows in a race, a course that must not be deviated from at risk of being disqualified.  
**2 Timothy 4:7 NAS** - " I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"
4. Over and over Paul described the Christian life in comparison to that of an athlete running a race. He was pursuing a prize.  
**1 Corinthians 9:24 NAU** - "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win."  
**Philippians 3:14 NAU** - "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."  
**2 Timothy 2:5 NAU** - "Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules."
5. In **Verse 19** Paul states that he had fully met the demands of the Gospel in the region from Jerusalem to Illyricum.  
**Romans 15:19 NAS** - "in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."  
**Romans 15:19 ESV** - "I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;"  
It is difficult to translate into English. It is a perfect infinitive form of πληρόω which simply means to complete or to make full.  
Paul is saying that he has fully applied the demands of the Gospel to this region.
6. Remember, Paul’s work was to enter an area where the Gospel had never been preached, plant new churches, and then move on.  
In **Verse 23** he made the bold statement that there was nothing else for him to do in this region.  
**Romans 15:23 NAU** - "but now, with no further place for me in these regions"  
**Romans 15:23 ESV** - "But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions"
7. So, what now? What was Paul to do? He had fulfilled his mission. By his own words there was nothing further for him to do. Was it time for him to retire? As I meditated upon this passage I was impressed by several things in the life of Paul that we can apply to our own lives.
  - I. The importance of setting goals – of having a plan.
  - II. The importance of being flexible in our plans
  - III. The importance of pressing on until the end
  - I. The importance of setting goals – of having a plan.
    - A. Paul had absolute confidence in God’s plan for his life
      1. He was called to be an apostle  
**Romans 1:1 NAU** - "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God"
      2. He was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles  
**Romans 15:16 NAU** - " to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that *my* offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

3. He was called to plant churches throughout the Gentile world  
**Romans 15:20 NAU** - "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named"
- B. Paul had long range plans and goals
1. This was Paul's pattern from the beginning. He conducted four major missionary journeys, each with plans and goals to be met  
 He always had a heart for the church and God's people  
**Acts 15:36 NAS** - "And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, *and* see how they are."
  2. We find in this passage that Paul had some definite goals  
 He had a goal of visiting Rome – this was a long time ambition for Paul  
**Romans 1:10-11 NAU** - "always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup>  
 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;"  
**Rom 15:23 NAU** - "I have had for many years a longing to come to you"
  3. He had a goal of traveling to Spain  
**Romans 15:24 NAU** - "whenever I go to Spain"  
 This was another Gentile region in need of the Gospel of Christ
  4. He had a goal of traveling to Jerusalem to deliver the offering he had been collecting for the saints in poverty  
**Romans 15:25 NAU** - "but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints."
- C. God expects us to be goal oriented
1. Notice Paul's goals were always Gospel saturated. This should be true for every Christian. Why do you want to pursue this or that career? Why do you want to get married? What are your goals in life?
    - a. Most Christians go through life without any particular since of direction. They don't consider their lives with regard to ministry.
    - b. My job is to equip you for ministry  
**Ephesians 4:11-12 NAS** - "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;"  
**KJV & ESV**  
**Ephesians 4:12 ESV** - "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,"
  2. Our desire should be goals consistent with God's plan for our life – but how doe we know God's plan? God doesn't give us an absolute blueprint. But He *does* give us direction.
    - a. This isn't a mystical thing – we don't have to know every detail
    - b. God doesn't give us a crystal ball to know His sovereign will  
 His sovereign will is secret. It belongs to Him.

3. So how do you make your plan?
  - a. He has given us His Word so that we might know His *revealed* will  
**Deuteronomy 29:29 NAS** - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."
  - b. The question of knowing God's will for our life is not one of knowing His sovereign will. It is about how can we properly discern God's revealed will from the teaching Scripture?  
**Psalms 119:105 KJV** - "Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."  
**Romans 12:2 NAS** - "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
  - c. He has given us the counsel of Godly saints  
**Proverbs 11:14 NAS** - "Where there is no guidance, the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory."  
**Proverbs 12:15 NAS** - "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel."  
**Proverbs 19:20 NAS** - "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days."
    - The division of Israel into the Northern and Southern tribes was the result of the foolish son of Solomon – Rehoboam refused to heed the sound counsel of the elders.  
**1 Kings 12:8 NAS** - "But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him."
4. The issue isn't trying to know God's sovereign will in all things. The issue is do you have a plan?
  - a. What drives your goals?
  - b. What is the motivation for your goals?
5. Is Christ at the heart of everything you do?  
And what are you doing in the kingdom?
6. Paul said, "I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named" – The word for "aspired" means ambition.  
Do you have any ambitions for Christ?  
Paul said, I'm planning to go to Spain. I'm planning to go to Jerusalem. I'm planning to come see you at Rome. He had lots of plans.

## II. The importance of being flexible in our plans

- A. Although Paul had many plans he always knew they were subject to change  
**Proverbs 16:9 NAS** - " The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."
  1. Again, we cannot know the sovereign will of God. Many times he will stop our plans in their tracks.

2. There are times that our duty in one area will prevent us from advancing to the next.

**Romans 15:23 NAU** - "I have had for many years a longing to come to you"

**Romans 15:22 NAU** - "For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you"

For what reason? Because of his calling to bring the Gospel to these frontier regions.

3. But now he has completed his work in these regions and he still is unable to go to Rome. Why because he has to bring the offering he has collected to Jerusalem.

**Romans 15:25 NAU** - " but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints."

**Romans 15:28 NAU** - "Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain."

B. God may stop you in your pursuit

1. He may be simply delaying your course until another time
2. You've studied hard, you've selected a university, you have a major selected in your field of study. Everything is in place, but then you are badly injured and unable to begin.
3. You and your mate have saved for a new home. After many years you've planned and finally have a down payment. Then you have a sudden expense that depletes part of the down payment.

C. God may change the course of our direction.

1. And we must be able to prioritize.
2. Paul was laboring in Kingdom work. The trip to Rome was also Kingdom work. He wasn't merely talking about a vacation.  
**Romans 1:11 NAU** - "For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;"
3. Do you know how to prioritize? Kingdom work should always have a place of priority  
**Matthew 6:33 KJV** - "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

III. The importance of pressing on until the end

A. Was it time for Paul to retire?

1. From his own lips his mission was complete  
**Romans 15:23 NAU** - "but now, with no further place for me in these regions"
2. He had worked hard and suffered much. He had the scars of being beaten and being stoned. He had suffered through a shipwreck. Surely he was tired and surely he deserved a break.
3. But we don't find Paul ready to retire. In fact, we don't find such a thing taught in Scripture.

4. This letter was penned around AD 57, probably from Corinth. We know that Paul would live another ten years before being put to death. He would indeed go to Jerusalem, he would travel to Rome. He would spend time under house arrest and finally suffer in prison.
  5. But he continued to labor until the end  
Finally, knowing his death was near he wrote:  
**2 Timothy 4:7 NAS** - "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;"
  6. Even in prison he felt compelled to continue his studies  
**2 Timothy 4:13 NAU** - "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments."
- B. What are your plans?
1. Are you zealously planning for service to Christ the rest of your life?  
Even at the age of 90 you could have another 10 years of service
  2. If God has made you a ss teacher are you pressing on in your studies?  
If God has made you a pastor are you looking forward to years of service?  
God has added you to this church. Are you constantly pondering how you can be of greater service?

#### Conclusion:

1. It is easy to fail in these areas. We can fail to give serious attention to the future. We can fail to set goals, make plans. But you can set rigid goals then we can become frustrated because we are inflexible in our plans.
2. And we can buy into the teaching of our culture that says you should only labor until you are 65 (or earlier) and then you spend the rest of your life fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. This is so ingrained into our thinking that several years ago I preached on this subject and I over heard a man whisper afterward, "I don't care what he says, I've still going to retire." The other man said, "Me too."  
I'm not saying the level or type of your work will not change. I'm saying that the Bible condemns a life of uselessness.
3. Much of our thoughts about retirement have been influenced by the Social Security Act of 1935. Workers became eligible for benefits at age 65 which at the time was older than the life-expectancy. A person born in 1995 could expect to live 35 years longer than a person born in 1900. Today there are about 60,000 Americans over the age of 100. Do we really think the God honoring pattern is spending the last 30 years of our life with no plan of being useful?
4. God gave us the Sabbath as our rest as well as a pattern of feasts and festivals – that is, brief periods of respite & leisure.
5. May God grant us to follow the pattern of Godly men of the Bible
  1. Noah was 600 years old when he completed the ark. Even after the flood he became a farmer.
  2. Jacob was over 70 years old when he began to labor for Laban. He worked for him until he was past 90
  3. Moses was eighty years old when he began to lead the children of Israel through the wilderness which would be a 40 year affair.
  4. Caleb was 85 years old when he went to war to conquer the land appointed to him.

5. Joshua labored until his death at the age of 110.  
In his last sermon before the people he said:  
**Joshua 24:15** – “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”
6. May we follow the pattern of Paul who stayed useful until the end.