

Pioneer Missionary Work Romans 15:17-21

Romans is a doctrinal treatise (1:18-15:13) wrapped in a personal letter

In the last section of the epistle, the apostle communicates...

1. His reason for writing this epistle (**15:14-16**)
2. His ministry ambitions (15:17-33)
3. Personal greetings (16:1-24)
4. A closing doxology (16:25-27)

The substance of Paul's apostolic ministry (17-19a)

verse 17

LSB "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have reason for boasting in things pertaining to God."

In the previous verses, Paul speaks of the grace God gave him to be a minister of Christ to the Gentiles. In the next verse, Paul will say that He will only speak of what Christ has accomplished through him.

Here in verse 17, Paul is saying that in Christ he has reason to boast of what has been done through him as an apostle.

We are not to boast in man. But we are to boast in the Lord, as Paul does.

18 "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience..."

Paul doesn't say, "what I have accomplished through Christ."

- The apostle is merely Christ's instrument

As we saw in verse 16, Christ uniquely sent Paul to "the Gentiles"

1:5 "through [Jesus Christ our Lord] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about **the obedience of faith** for the sake of his name among all the nations,"

1. "the obedience of faith" is also mentioned in 16:25-27
2. Obedience to the Lordship of Christ, which obedience originates from faith in Him

The purpose of Paul's apostolic ministry was that Gentiles would, by God's saving work in them, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and, leaving their former way of life, become obedient to Him.

- "for the sake of [Christ's] name" (1:5)

15:18–19 “...by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...”

1. What Christ accomplished through Paul was accomplished by means of “word and deed,” as Paul preached and taught, and planted and nurtured churches
2. Paul’s message was authenticated by powerful “signs and wonders”
 - **2 Cor. 12:12** “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.”
3. The word of Christ was made effective in hearts and lives “by the power of the Spirit of God”

The extent of Paul’s apostolic ministry (19b)

19 “so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;”

This is the result of Christ’s work through Paul

Question: What does Paul mean in verse 19 that from Jerusalem to Illyricum he has fulfilled the ministry of the gospel?

Paul preached the gospel for a brief time to Jews in Jerusalem and Judea, which were in the eastern half of the Roman Empire (Acts 9:26-30; 26:20)

In his apostolic ministry, he moved further and further west with the gospel, making it all the way to Illyricum

1. Not recorded in Acts
2. Northwest of Macedonia, in what we know as northern Albania and part of former Yugoslavia

The large area in which Paul ministered along the northern Mediterranean includes Syria, Cyprus, Asia Minor, and Greece

Paul had fulfilled in these regions the apostolic ministry Christ gave him—to preach the gospel and plant churches in the largest cities

Paul understood that there was much gospel work still to be done by the churches in these regions. But he knew the gospel had been proclaimed widely enough in these regions, and churches had been planted firmly enough, to assure that the gospel would continue to spread in these regions.

Paul understood his apostolic ministry to be that of a pioneer missionary.

Because he had fulfilled this ministry of the gospel in the regions he mentioned, it was time for him to make plans to take the gospel further west

The ambition of Paul's apostolic ministry (20-21)

verse 20

“not where Christ has already been named”

1. Where Christ is named by people as Lord and Savior
2. Where there are believers
3. **2 Tim. 2:19** “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let **everyone who names the name of the Lord** depart from iniquity.’”

“lest I build on someone else’s foundation”

1. There is nothing wrong with a believer doing so. It is necessary.
 - Apollos did so
 - **1 Corinthians 3:5-10**
2. Paul knew his apostolic commission, as a general rule, did not include this

verse 21

Paul’s ambition is in line with what God revealed in the OT of His purpose

Quotes Isaiah 52:15b

1. *Read 52:13-15*
2. 15a teaches that Christ will cleanse many nations, and that kings in those nations will submit to Him
3. 15b teaches that these nations will not at first be told of Christ and His work, but later they will understand the things of Christ
 - cf. 53:1

Observe how Paul uses this passage in Romans 15:20-21

This is why Paul wants to go to Spain (**verse 24**)

Question: How does this passage bear on missions today and reaching unreached people groups?

According to Joshua Project, 42% of the world's nearly 8 billion people live in unreached people groups

- Joshua Project defines an unreached people group as a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside assistance

Wycliffe Global Alliance gives statistics on the translation of the Bible into the world's languages

1. The full Bible has been translated into the primary languages of 75% of the world's population
2. This means the full Bible has NOT been translated into the primary languages of 25% of the world's population (2 billion people)

Conclusion

Matt. 9:37–38 “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”

Pray for those laboring in the Lord's harvest around the world