

Having examined through v16 two weeks ago—we come this morning to vv17-21—wherein Paul continues an inspired description of his gospel ministry—two weeks ago we learned—[1] Christ Himself called him to the ministry, [2] he was called to minister to the Gentiles, and [3] he was called to minister—"the gospel of God"—that is—a message from God and about God—or, it was the message of our need for Christ (1-3), God's provision of Christ (3-5), the benefits of having Christ (6-8), and the responsibilities of belonging to Christ (12-15)...

- I. The Source of Paul's Ministry—vv17-19
- II. The Nature of Paul's Ministry—vv18-19
- III. The Focus of Paul's Ministry—vv20-21

I. The Source of Paul's Ministry—vv17-19

1. That is—what was it that fuelled the apostle's ministry—if we were to trace it back to its roots—what were they...
2. V17—"Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God"—the NAS has helpfully rendered this phrase—"Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God..."
3. The Greek word rendered "glory" carries with it the idea of "boasting" and "rejoicing"—of deep seated confidence...
4. The point being—Paul understood his only reason to boast—was found in Christ—concerning his service to God...
5. All that he did—he did because of Christ—all of his labors were the result of what Christ did in and through him...
6. Phil.3:3-4—"For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so..."
7. Here the word rendered "rejoice" is a cousin to the word rendered "glory" in our text—it again means—to boast...
8. Notice he puts to things as opposites—a Christian is someone who—"boasts in Christ...and has no confidence in the flesh..."
9. He then defines what he means by "flesh" in verses 5-6—that is—human effort and merit—who we are and what we've done...
10. 1Cor.1:30-31—"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption - 31 that, as it is written, He who glories, let him glory in the LORD..."
11. Thus—in general—the apostle confesses—that all that he is, has, and does—is the result of being in Christ Jesus...
12. Now—from the immediate context—we find two things found in Christ—that served as the source of Paul's ministry...
13. [1] The grace of God, v15b—"because of the grace given to me by God"—this is why he was called a Christian and minister...
14. Put another way—he was what he was—because of the grace of God—all that he did—was by the grace of God...
15. Now—here we could look literally at dozens of texts—wherein Paul underscores this great truth about grace...
16. That is—in every letter he writes—he intends to make clear—that all that he is and does—is due to God's grace...
17. Gal.1:15-17—"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus..."

18. Now—here let me remind you what the word "grace" means—simply put—it's favor shown to the ill-deserving...
19. Or—we could put it like this—grace is God's love shown to those, who because of their sins, deserve the opposite...
20. Thus—grace is only rightly understood against the backdrop of man's sin and guilt—what he actually deserves...
21. 1Cor.15:9-10—"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy 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 was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me [1Cor.3:10]..."
22. Now we know brethren—and this is the point of Paul in v17—that God's saving grace is found only in Christ...
23. 1Cor.1:4—"I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus [Gal.1:6; Eph.2:7; 2Tim.2:1]..."
24. [2] The Spirit of God, v19—"in mighty signs and wonders, by [in or through] the power of the Spirit of God..."
25. In other words—in Christ the Father gives us the gracious gift of the Spirit—to empower us for His service...
26. V18—"For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me..."
27. That is—Christ Himself worked within him by the Spirit—it was by the Spirit that Christ empowered him...
28. Now—it's important to remember—that the Spirit not only empowered Paul—He made the gospel effectual...
29. 1Cor.2:1-5—"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God..."
30. [a] WHAT he preached, v2—"for I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified..."
31. [b] HOW he preached, v3—"I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power..."
32. That is—he preached consciously weak and dependent upon the direct help and blessing of the Spirit of God...
33. Stuart Olyott—"The power of Paul's ministry did not lie in his own gifts, accomplishments, intellect or abilities. None of these things could take the credit. There was only one explanation for it all—God was with him! The Spirit of Christ had given him divine assistance, and had blessed the work..."
34. [a] All that we are, we are by grace—was Paul a Christian man and an apostle of Christ—it was by God's grace...
35. Now—none of us, within this room, have been made an apostle—and at present—only three of us are church officers...
36. But—this principle—is just as true for every person within this room—everything you are—is by the grace of God...
37. [i] Are you still not a Christian, yet are kept from scandalous sins?—then this too—is the fruit of God's common grace to you...
38. That is—it's only this generic or general grace of God that has kept you from living as other nonChristians live...
39. [ii] Are you a Christian—that is—has God saved you from your sins—here we learn what's made you to differ...
40. [b] All that we do, we do by grace—as we look around us we might be tempted to compare ourselves with others...

41. Perhaps—we could be tempted to compare ourselves with Christians in other churches or within this church...
42. Perhaps we've made more progress in certain areas than others have—we've known growth in grace and knowledge...

II. The Nature of Paul's Ministry—vv18-19

1. V18—"For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient..."
2. Notice—Paul specifically describes his ministry as twofold—in word and deed—by what he said and done...
3. He then describes this in detail in v19—"in mighty signs and wonders...I have fully preached the gospel of Christ..."
4. [1] Word—"I have fully preached the gospel of Christ"—that is—he preached the gospel—"from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum..."
5. Paul provides a large circle which loosely defines his missionary endeavors—consisting of ten years of labors...
6. Illyricum [Illurikum] serves as the furthest point Northwest from Jerusalem—the extreme part of Macedonia...
7. Gill—"Hither the apostle went, not in a direct line, but round about, and took many countries, cities, and towns in his way, as the history of his journeys and travels in the Acts of the Apostles shows, and as he here suggests..."
8. Now—when Paul says that he "fully preached the gospel"—he doesn't mean he preached it in every single place...
9. He simply means—he preached it throughout these places—establishing churches throughout to finish the work...
10. The word rendered "fully" means to "fulfill"—the point being—he filled these regions with the gospel of God...
11. Literally—we could render the phrase—"I have FILLED UP these entire regions with the gospel of Christ..."
12. [2] Deed, v19—"in mighty signs and wonders"—that is—he not only preached but performed great miracles...
13. The terms "signs and wonders" are generic terms that describe supernatural miracles of all kinds and types...
14. The word "sign" means the miracle was intended to show something—to point to something as a sign points to something else...
15. The word "wonder" refers to the "wonder and awe" that the miracle was intended to produce in those who saw it...
16. Thus I suggest—"signs and wonders" had two primary purposes—to point to God's word, and God's heart...
17. [a] To point to God's word—that is—miracles were intended to validate the message and messenger as from God...
18. That is—the sign gifts were not ends in themselves—but served as signs that pointed to the divine origin of the message...
19. Mk.16:20—"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen..."
20. 2Cor.12:12—"Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds..."
21. Now—the church has always understood that these sign miracles were specifically given to the apostolic age...
22. It must be remembered—that these miracles were pervasive, public, undeniable, verifiable, and supernatural..
23. That is—they were radical—dead people were raised to life—the lame walked, the deaf heard, the blind saw...

24. [b] To point to God's heart—that is—miracles were not only intended to verify the word but reveal God's heart...
25. Acts 10:38—"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him..."

III. The Focus of Paul's Ministry—vv20-21

1. Simply put—the focus of Paul's ministry was the Gentile nations—or those people who never heard the gospel...
2. V20—"And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation..."
3. The phrase—"lest I build on another man's foundation"—means he wanted to go to unreached people groups...
4. As an apostle—it was his responsibility to lay the foundation—upon which others were left to build upon....
5. Thus—it isn't that Paul was opposed to build upon the ministry of others—but he was called to lay the foundation...
6. 1Cor.3:6-7—"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase..."
7. V21—"but as it is written: To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand..."
8. Isa.52:13-15—"Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. 14 Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; 15 so shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider..."
9. This passage is a summary of chapter 53—it fundamentally contains three things—exaltation, humiliation, and salvation...
10. [a] Exaltation, v13—"behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high..."
11. This is a reference to the resurrection and exhalation of Christ—He will be raised and exalted upon David's throne...
12. [b] Humiliation, v14—"Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men..."
13. This is a reference to the sufferings and crucifixion of Christ—He suffered both at the hands of man and God...
14. [c] Salvation, v15—"so shall He sprinkle many nations"—that is, many Gentiles shall be justified by His blood...
15. The prophet Isaiah then speaks of Gentile kings—as representation of the Gentile justified by Christ's blood...
16. Now—it's important here to also recognize that this salvation will be obtained through human proclamation...
17. This of course—ties in with the purpose of Paul in quoting this text—the Gentiles will be *told* and *hear* about Him...
18. Remember—Paul says that he preached the gospel of Christ throughout the nations—he told them about Him...
19. Now—I trust that Paul missionary endeavors necessitated great drive and included physical danger and difficulty...
20. 2Cor.11:22-28—"Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool - I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in

- sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches..."
21. Thus in closing—I want to ask the question—what drove Paul to endure such hardship in taking the gospel to others...
 22. Now—before I suggest a few things from this passage—let me make a few quick clarifications necessary for us all...
 23. This passage is biographical of Paul—who held an unusual office of apostle—and thus in many ways is unique...
 24. None of us are apostles called and equipped to do what Paul did—I'm not an apostle and you're not an apostle...
 25. Paul was commissioned to take the gospel across three continents—on three missionary journeys—over ten years...
 26. But—although none of us are apostles—this doesn't mean this passage isn't relevant to every Christian present...
 27. For me, yes—as a gospel minister—but also for every Christian here—we need to share the gospel with sinners...
 28. Now—this is NOT always EASY—it may not bring with it the dangers that Paul faced in the first century...
 29. But—it's nevertheless not easy—thus—how are we—like Paul—to have the endurance to perform this task...
 30. Well—I suggest we find in Paul three things—that we too can and should have—to drive us to labor for God...
 31. [1] A heartfelt sense of man's native condition—that is—that men are by nature are in darkness and depravity...
 32. This no doubt—was one reason why Paul was willing to put himself at great risk—love for his fellow man...
 33. Why did Paul travel across land and sea—endure all of the hardships that he did—what drove him in these things...
 34. Well—my friends—he told us throughout the letter—there's wrath coming and most people are not prepared...
 35. Although man knows about God through conscience and creation—he suppresses the truth in unrighteousness...
 36. As the result—the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven—against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...
 37. 2Cor.5:10-11—"For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ...knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."
 38. [2] A heartfelt sense of God's grace toward him—that is—Paul was conscious of what God did for and in him...
 39. Rom.1:14-15—"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also..."
 40. He understood that he no longer belonged to himself but Christ—and thus—he sought to tell others of His love...
 41. 2Cor.5:14-15—"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again..."
 42. [3] A heartfelt sense of God's provision in Christ—that is—Paul labored, dependant upon the power of the Spirit...
 43. Brethren—we have to remember—all we can do is plant—others water—but only God can give the increase...
 44. The conversion of a sinner is a work beyond our abilities—and thus we are never responsible for the results...
 45. Like Paul we should attempt great things for God—but like Paul—we can only plant and water—leaving the increase to God...