

Rom 15:14-29 The Work of a Minister

Paul notes that he is satisfied with their progress. He identifies three key things he observed in them – full of goodness, knowledge, and able to instruct one another. That is a good description of a healthy faith, so let's break it down a little.

Full of goodness. The word *agathosune* describes the qualities of a person who has moral excellence as well as goodness. We saw back in Rom 12:2 that in Christ we are to have our minds renewed, so that we can discern what is good and pleasing in God's sight. This is a radical transformation, bringing us from the darkness and wickedness of our natural sin nature, and enabling us to recognize and practice the light and goodness of God's righteousness. A true experience of God's salvation infuses us with the ability to do good – because we have His new life within us, guided by His Holy Spirit. Paul was able to see that transformation in the lives of the Roman believers.

Filled with all knowledge. This is the word *gnosis*, which means "a seeking to know, an enquiry." It is especially applied to spiritual truth – that which can't be intuitively known by observation, or something that is privileged information, like in a confidential, exclusive group. All through history mankind has acknowledged that there is secret, hidden knowledge of a spiritual nature which will benefit mankind. Many religious groups have been formed for the purpose of seeking out that information by various means. God tells us that He is pleased to give His true knowledge to anyone who seeks Him. (Deut 4:29 – "you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul." Ps 119:66 – "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments." Pr 1:7 – "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." Pr 2:1,5,6 – "My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you...then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.")

Able to instruct one another. This would be an outcome of the first two things. A person who is filled with God's goodness and knowledge will want to share that with others, help them in understanding the same things. Spiritual maturity is not selfish – it always encourages others in spiritual growth.

Paul saw these things in the Roman church, and yet he also saw opportunities to further instruct them, to spur them on to more growth in their faith. That is the work of a minister. Notice how he describes it: "But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." A minister (*leitourgos*) is "one who discharged a public office at his own expense." You may recognize our English word "liturgy" in there, which points to the spiritual nature of this service. Paul saw his life as one dedicated to serving God and His people – no matter the personal cost to him. In that service, he focused on instructing others in the truths of the gospel, so that they would not only receive Christ's salvation, but as we have seen through the book of Romans, they would also understand the deeper aspects of that salvation, both in its underlying meaning as well as in its outworking in life.

The people that Paul ministered to were largely Gentiles – non-Jews who didn't have the cultural background of understanding what God had done and taught through the Old Testament; people who were spiritual foreigners. His work was to bring them into the knowledge of God's grace in salvation, so they could worship Him in Spirit and in truth, becoming acceptable through faith in Christ.

Paul then says (v. 17) "In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God – so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ". He was properly proud – not in a self-exalting way, but proud of how God was able to use him, and proud that God received the glory through him. From Jerusalem to Illyricum – which is the area of modern-day Croatia – the gospel of Christ was preached to people who had never before heard God's plan of salvation. Paul's goal was to preach the gospel in new areas, expanding the frontiers of the church. As he said, "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, 'those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.'" (quoting Is 52:15)

We should thank God for people like Paul, missionaries bringing the good news of salvation to new areas and peoples, and do all we can to help them. This is why our church supports missionaries. We should also endeavor to be ministers of God's grace wherever He has called us, instructing one another in His Word and encouraging one another to live for His glory.