

## Romans: Verse-by-Verse

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### Romans 15:17-19

Last time: The first of Paul's descriptions of his apostolic ministry: **A Priestly Ministry To The Gentiles.**

Verses 17-19: "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit."

- **A Remarkable Summary:**

An expression of praise: "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God."

Considering the difficulties of apostolic ministry, it is encouraging to hear Paul say that he still glories in Christ Jesus in his service to God.

A progression: First, he glories in Christ Jesus. Paul is using a Hebrew expression that is found throughout the Old Testament. See: 1 Chronicles 16:10; Psalms 106:47

Paul uses the same phrase in his other epistles. See: Philippians 3:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:19.

Paul's use of glorying in keeps the focus where it belongs. He is not glorying in his ministry. He is not glorying in the results of his ministry. He glories in Christ Jesus.

The next progression: "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus **in my service to God.**" His service is to God.

Often, we think of our service being to people. While people are the recipients of our ministries, our real service is to God. He is the One who called us; our ultimate accountability is to Him.

Paul's Reasons To "Glory":

He proved to be the premiere apostle to the Gentiles. No one had a greater influence on the 1<sup>st</sup>-century spread of the Gospel to the Gentile world than Paul.

Verse 18-19: "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit."

Paul deflects any credit for his ministry to the Gentiles to Christ. He speaks of what Christ has accomplished through him. Paul does not indicate what he has accomplished through Christ – but rather – *what Christ has accomplished through him*.

- **Paul's Characterization Of Apostolic Ministry:**

### **1. The Obedience Of The Gentiles**

It's interesting that Paul says his ministry was to "lead the Gentiles to obey God." Paul uses that same Greek phrase in Romans 1:5 and 16:25-26.

Paul takes the long view of apostolic ministry to the Gentiles. The Gentiles, who for many centuries stood outside of God's Law and Covenant, were now being called to obedience to God.

Paul certainly could have focused on the Gentiles coming to Christ by faith – which they certainly did – but he chooses to emphasize how a world of people who rebelled and lived outside of God's commands, have come to obedience through apostolic preaching and teaching.

## 2. The Power Of Signs And Miracles:

Verse 19: Paul's apostolic activity was ... "by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit." Twice in that statement he uses the word "dynamis" – a Greek word for power.

Paul makes it clear that the power of the Holy Spirit was responsible for the spread of the Gospel. This power included both signs and miracles.

A list of the miracles associated with Paul's missionary journeys in the Book of Acts:

- In Acts 12:10, A prison gate was miraculously opened.
- In Acts 13:11-12, Paul blinded Elymus.
- In Acts 14:3-4, Paul performed miracles in Iconium.
- In Acts 14:8-18, At Lystra, Paul healed a crippled man.
- In Acts 16:18, Paul healed a woman possessed by an evil spirit.
- In Acts 16:26, A miraculous earthquake opened doors in the Philippian prison.
- In Acts 19:6, In Ephesus, 12 men spoke in tongues, and prophesied.
- In Acts 19:11-12, Paul performed other miracles in Ephesus.
- In Acts 20:8-12, In Troas, Paul raised Eutychus from the dead.
- In Acts 28:3-6, On Malta, Paul was not affected by a snake bite.
- In Acts 28:8-9, Paul healed the Maltese who had diseases.

Miracles were a part of 1<sup>st</sup>-century evangelism. Signs and miracles were part of the disciples' ministry when Jesus sent them out to preach – whether it was the original 12 or the larger group of disciples.

In Matthew 10: 7-8, as Jesus sent the twelve out to preach, he told them: "As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons."

Signs and miracles were a standard part of Jesus' own ministry – and it was part of the disciples' ministry. So Paul is continuing in the pattern of evangelism he knew was part and parcel of New Testament evangelism.

- **Signs and Miracles:**

As Paul cites “the power of signs and miracles” he identifies two of three common expressions of the Holy Spirit's power in evangelism and ministry to believers. Let's use some simple definitions to help us understand what Paul is referring to:

In the New Testament, a “Sign” (semeion ) is used of miracles taken as evidence of divine authority. Sometimes it is translated as “miracle” such as in Luke 23:8; Acts 4:16; and Acts 4:16.

“Wonders” comes from the Greek word “tera” and is the root word for our English word “terror”. The New Testament uses the word “wonder” to describe something unusual that causes the person who sees it to marvel. In the Book of Acts “wonders” normally follow “signs”, but they can precede it as well (Acts 2:22; Acts 2:22; 2:43; Acts 6:8).

While signs appeal to the understanding, a wonder appeals to the imagination. “Wonders” are usually presented as God's activity. See: Acts 2:19; Acts 4:30; Acts 5:12; Acts 6:8; Acts 7:36; Acts 14:3; Acts 15:12).

In the New Testament, power or (dunamis) is also used. Powers generally refer to inherent ability, supernatural activity, or supernatural character. See: Mark 6:2; Acts 8:13; Acts 19:11; Romans 15:19).

“Signs” were employed to demonstrate the arrival of God's kingdom, while “powers” exhibit God's power over nature. “Wonders” evoke people's amazement.

Paul makes it clear that his ministry to the Gentiles was marked by these supernatural events. In that context, Paul understood these

signs, miracles, and wonders were meant to authenticate apostolic ministry.

Paul's only other use of these three words in relation to his ministry is found in 2 Corinthians 12:12, where he calls them "the things that mark an apostle" or "the signs of a true apostle".

As the early Church father Chrysostom put it, the signs of Paul's apostolic priesthood were "not the long garment and the bells as they of old, nor the mitre and the turban, but signs and wonders, far more awe-filled than these".

This is Paul's preliminary description of his ministry to the Gentiles. Next time, we will see the scope of his ministry.