

## Romans: Verse-by-Verse

---

### Romans 15:14-17

As we come to Romans 15:14, we discover that Paul is done with his lengthily discussion on matters of conscience. More than this, he is transitioning to a long conclusion of this letter.

Because of Paul's twin benedictions in Romans 15:5, 13, his readers might have assumed his letter was done. It isn't. Paul now returns to his earliest theme: His relationship to the Roman churches, and why he hasn't visited them up to this point.

It reflects what Paul said in Romans 1:13:

"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles."

In what follows, Paul outlines his ministry to the Gentiles. He will give them an overview of his ministry in preparation for his intended visit.

Notice how Paul begins this section: "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another."

That is quite a statement, considering Paul spent chapters giving the Roman Christians instructions on dealing with matters of conscience.

Paul must have been aware that these instructions might have come across as criticism. Consequently, he wants to affirm his confidence in them.

Despite the issues between the Jewish and Gentile Christians, Paul

believes their spirituality is still strong. He believes they are “full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”

If Paul believes this, why did he find it necessary to write such a long letter about so many things? Why did he spend so much time addressing the disputes that were taking place over dietary laws, sabbath worship, and drinking alcoholic beverages?

At the outset of this passage he gives two reasons: First, in verse 15 Paul writes, “I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again...” Second, in verse 16 Paul indicates this was due to “the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles...”

Let's look at these one at a time.

- **A Ministry Of Reminding:**

Paul says he wrote boldly on some points, as if to remind the Romans of these things they had already been taught. This is, in fact, a large part of first-century apostolic work.

As the apostles saw it, they had been given the task of accurately presenting the original Gospel. Their role was to establish the believers in the faith. As a result, they were often required to remind the churches of the original message, so as to keep them grounded in the truth.

Let me give you some examples of this “reminding” that Paul refers to:

- 1 Corinthians 15:1: “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.”

- 2 Timothy 1:6: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”
- Titus 3:1: “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good...”
- 2 Peter 1:12: “So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.”
- Jude 5: “Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.”

The apostles found it necessary to constantly remind their hearers and readers of what they had originally taught them. Keep in mind, that this was the first century – with an embryonic Church. They had no Bibles; much of what they knew had been transmitted verbally.

That said, even in an era when Christians have Bibles, the ministry of preaching and teaching has not really changed. While there may be new insights, the revelation is the same. While the presentation of God's Word may change, the Truth of God's Word doesn't.

In reality, much of what modern evangelists, pastors, and teachers share is a reminding of what God's Word has already said for nearly 2,000 years. Believers must still be reminded of what they know.

- **A Ministry To The Gentiles:**

In verses 15-16, Paul states his second reason for reaching out to the Roman Christians. He writes:

“I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the

gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

Paul's second reason is tied to his unique ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles. This is the third time in this letter he has referenced this unique calling.

- In Romans 1:5, he wrote: "Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."
- In Romans 11:13, he wrote: "I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry."

I think it is easy for us to forget the uniqueness of Paul's calling. To be accurate, Paul was not the first post-Resurrection apostle sent to the Gentiles. That honor belonged to Peter. In Acts 10, we read how Peter had a vision in which the Holy Spirit instructed him to go with three men to a Gentile's home.

Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius and those who were gathered to hear his message. Here's what we read in Acts 10:

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.*

*Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*

What is interesting, is that Peter didn't continue in that role. In fact, at point he seemed to digress from that initial event. In Galatians 2, Paul records an encounter he had with Peter. He writes:

But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him in public, because he was clearly wrong. 12 Before some men who had been sent by James arrived there, Peter had been eating with the Gentile believers. But after these men arrived, he drew back and would not eat with the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who were in favor of circumcising them.

13 The other Jewish believers also started acting like cowards along with Peter; and even Barnabas was swept along by their cowardly action. 14 When I saw that they were not walking a straight path in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you have been living like a Gentile, not like a Jew. How, then, can you try to force Gentiles to live like Jews?” – Galatians 2:11-14

In the decades that followed, it was Paul became the obvious apostle to the Gentiles. Peter spent the bulk of his life in Jerusalem, despite claims that he founded the Church in Rome. As professor Nicola Lewis puts it:

Interestingly, the Bible says nothing about Peter ever traveling to Rome. When the gospels end, Peter is in Jerusalem. It's the same in the Book of Acts. The apostle Paul, in his letters, also talks about meeting Peter in the eastern Mediterranean. After Jesus' death, Paul says that Jesus' brother, James, and Peter are the co-leaders of the “church,” or assembly, of Jesus-followers in Jerusalem.

With all of this in mind, Paul will spend the next seven verses describing the nature of his ministry to the Gentiles. Let's look at what he says:

### **1. A Priestly Ministry To The Gentiles: vv. 16–17**

**In verses 16-17 Paul** makes one of the most unusual statements in the New Testament about his ministry to the Gentiles. He cites, “... The grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God ...”

This statement must have surprised many of his readers. Here is a Jewish Apostle insisting that God has given him a priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God to the Gentiles.

Paul's vocabulary here is very specific. According to scholars, the Greek word he uses for minister is used "exclusively of religious and ritual services" In the New Testament, this word is applied to both the Jewish priesthood and Christ as our great high priest.

The imagery is clear: Paul is painting a picture of himself as a priest, connecting his role to offering sacrifices that are acceptable to God. This metaphor is rare, considering Paul is connecting it to his ministry to the Gentiles.

Drawing from his Jewish background, Paul says his ministry is to proclaim the Gospel of God to the Gentiles. Notice the uniqueness of that phrase, "The Gospel of God". Paul will use this phrase four times in his letters, while Peter will use it once.

If Paul is connecting his priestly ministry to the Gentiles with the idea of sacrifice, then what is his ministry? John Stott concludes, "Paul regards his missionary work as a priestly ministry because he is able to offer his Gentile converts as a living sacrifice to God."

This is such an interesting passage! In Paul's day, the Jewish authorities were adamant about excluding the Gentiles from the Temple. The Gentiles had no priestly role in offering sacrifices to God in Herod's Temple.

Yet, Paul insists that through the Gospel of God, the Gentiles have become an acceptable offering to God. His duty was to proclaim the Gospel so that the Gentiles might enter this new relationship with God.

Paul's ministry, then, was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and to offer them to God as sacrifices. As many Bible scholars have pointed out, this is still the Church's two primary functions: worship and witness.

As we worship God, we remind ourselves of this wondrous relationship we have with God through the sacrifice of His Son. As we share the gospel with others, we fulfil our role of bringing others to Christ.

Next time, we will see more of Paul's description of his ministry to the Gentiles.