

What is Our Work for God?

Scripture Text: Romans 15:14-21

Introduction

We are nearing the end of Paul's letter to the Romans. On our journey through this letter, we have discovered some important truths for the church. We have learned that we have the *greater duty* to love one other even when it conflicts with our freedom in Christ. We have learned to follow Jesus' example of putting others before ourselves. Paul has reminded us that Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises to both the Jews and Gentiles. God has been faithful to His promises and merciful to us by providing His Son, Jesus Christ, as *the substitute* for our sin. Paul has shown us that God's mission from the beginning of time is to redeem His creation from the Fall. God has always planned to grant mercy to the world through Jesus Christ, who not only gives us mercy and grace, but also hope. Without Christ we are literally hopeless, for there is no other way and no other name by which anyone can be saved (John 14:6, Acts 4:11-12).

And now as we are nearing the end of chapter fifteen of Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul moves from explaining the gospel of Jesus Christ and the hope we have in Him, to some concluding remarks about working for God and striving together for that work. In this passage, Paul focused on his work for God and what it meant to the church. He reminded the Romans of some things they knew and wrote about the work God had called him to do. What was Paul's work for God? What was the church in Rome's work for God? More importantly, what is our work for God? How can we be a faithful servant of God if we do not know what He has called us to do? Let us look at a few things Paul mentioned about what God has called him to do and then see what it might mean for us.

Paul's Work to Disciple Believers

Paul called himself a servant of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1). Paul served his Lord and he was proud of his work for his Lord. He desired to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. Like others, he wanted to hear the words "Well done my good and faithful servant". In serving God, Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome to remind them of some things in order to help them grow in their faith. Look at the following verses.

Romans 15:14–16 ¹⁴ *I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. ¹⁵ But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ 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.*

Paul wrote that he was satisfied (or certain) that the church in Rome was full of goodness, full of knowledge, and able to instruct one another. This goodness was related to them helping one another. Being filled or complete in knowledge meant the church knew what they needed to know. Having the required knowledge, the church

was competent to instruct one another. Paul mentioned that he had written boldly about some things to the church in Rome, meaning that he was refreshing their memory about some basic things of the Christian faith. Paul wanted the church in Rome, and all churches everywhere, to be mature in their faith and to be able to help one another. Paul was convinced that God had gifted the Roman Christians for effective service and healthy church life and the church needed to use their knowledge and gifts for God.

Paul was essentially *discipling* the followers of Jesus Christ. He was investing in them by teaching and reminding them important things about *being the church*. Paul was like a parent who invests his or her life to train and raise a child so that the child will grow into a productive member of society. Here, Paul, the spiritual father of the Roman believers, was proud of his work in helping them grow into productive members of God's family. We all need help to grow in our faith. It is not enough for us to just accept Jesus Christ. We cannot claim to be complete in our faith. We all need to grow in our faith. Are you more mature in your faith now than when you began? Paul encouraged stronger Christians in the church to help their weaker brothers and sisters to become mature in faith. Paul wrote this letter so that it would help the church in Rome *grow in maturity*.

Paul referred to himself in several roles to the church. In chapter eleven, Paul said he was an "apostle to the Gentiles", an ambassador God had sent to reach the Gentiles for Jesus Christ. In this passage, Paul mentioned that he was a "minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles". God had sent him to serve the Gentiles for Jesus Christ. Paul also wrote in this passage that he was in the "priestly service of the gospel of God". Was Paul a priest of God? Yes! In a sense, we all are, for we are a priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5,9). What do priests do? They offer sacrifices to God on behalf of His people. Paul was a priest of God so that the offering of the Gentiles would be acceptable to God. Was this something put in the offering plate on Sunday morning? Was this something given to Paul's ministry or to the ministries of the church? No! Paul served as a priest of God so as to offer mature Gentiles to God. Paul's work for God was to help the believers in Rome to become fully grown Christians who are acceptable to the Lord.

Paul's Work to Bring Glory to God

Perhaps this point should have been mentioned first. Part of Paul's work for God was to disciple the believers in the church. In fact, that is the work of all churches. If the church is not discipling believers, if it is not moving believers from baby Christians to mature followers of Christ, then it is not doing its job. What is the ultimate purpose of this work for God, though? For Paul, was it for his satisfaction (Romans 15:14)? Did Paul work to receive accolades or pats on his back? Let us look at the following verses.

Romans 15:17–19 ¹⁷ *In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.* ¹⁸ *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, ¹⁹ 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;*

Paul acknowledged that he was proud of his work for God. This is not unusual. Many people take pride in their work. Pride often indicates a sense of accomplishment, usually when one is satisfied with his or her own work. Many people are very proud of what “they accomplish” and they want to tell the world about it. Many people want their name on certificates, and diplomas, and other pieces of paper hanging on a wall or in a place where it is visible to others. One of the most helpful advice I ever received was to not be focused on titles or degrees. People do not care as much about what is before or after your name as much as they want to know that you care about them. Paul was proud of his work, but not for the sake of receiving recognition for it. Are you so proud?

Paul did not write about his own accomplishments, but what Christ accomplished through him. Paul acknowledged that it was Christ Who was working through him. Paul summarized his entire ministry by saying that Christ worked through him, in his preaching about Christ and in what he did to accompany those words. Paul boasted of his ministry, but not to glorify himself, rather to make much of Jesus Christ. Paul also mentioned that his work for God was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit of God that enabled Paul to accomplish all that he did for God. It is the same Spirit that enables the Church today to fulfill its mission for God. Without the Holy Spirit empowering us to live on mission, we are powerless to do what God has called us to do. God enables us to do His work and to bring Him glory. Our ultimate work for God, our reason for existing, is to bring Him glory. Whatever we do, we ought to do it to make much of Jesus Christ because we were created to worship Him.

Paul’s Work to Reach the Lost

Paul was proud of what Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit had done for the Roman believers. Paul was proud of how God used him to spread the gospel all the way from Jerusalem to the Roman province of Illyricum (modern Albania). In verse nineteen, Paul wrote that he had fulfilled his mandate to preach the gospel among the Gentiles in that region. How could Paul say his work was complete when many people had not heard the gospel in that area? It could be that churches had been planted in key places, and from there Paul’s coworkers would bring the gospel to the outlying areas. In a sense, his work was not done, but it was complete as the gospel was being planted and spread in those areas. Is our work for God complete? Have we reached the end of our ministry in this community or is there much more work to be done? Paul’s ministry was not just about discipling a church that just needed a reminder of certain things. Paul’s work was also to reach lost people for Jesus Christ. Look at the following verses.

Romans 15:20–21 ²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, ²¹ but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”

Paul’s ambition, what he aspired to do, was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to those who had never heard of Christ. Paul had the heart of a missionary. He wanted to go places to share Jesus Christ with those who did not know Him. That was Paul’s

calling, but one does not need to be a missionary like Paul to share Jesus with those who do not know Him. You can go into your own neighborhood to do that. You can share Christ with your co-workers, your friends, and your family. Paul's ambition was to go to places where Christ had never been preached, to preach the gospel in areas where no churches existed. In so doing, Paul was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 52:15, a prophecy about God's Suffering Servant, which Paul quoted in verse twenty-one of this passage. God used Paul to share Christ with those who had never heard of Him.

Essentially, God used Paul to plant churches throughout the Roman Empire. Paul was a church planter; others would come water the soil, but God would ultimately give the growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). Do we have the same ambition and desire that Paul had? Do we want to see people who have never seen or heard of Jesus Christ come to know Him? This does not mean that we have to go to another country like Paul did, although God may tell you to do that. If God calls you to go to another country to share Jesus with the people there, then do the work God has called you to do. While we will not all receive that calling, we all need to have compassion for people who are lost, perishing, and on the way to hell. We all need have a love for our neighbors that motivates us to share the hope we have with them. Do you want to see people know Christ? A lack of passion for the lost may indicate a lack of love for others and ultimately a lack of love for God. It should be our desire to seek the lost and tell them about Jesus Christ.

What is Our Work for God?

Now that we have seen Paul's work in this passage, maybe a question for us is this: "What is our work for God?" What has God called us to do? Christians are called to serve the King of Kings. We have an awesome responsibility to serve Jesus Christ. Do you treat that awesome privilege and responsibility to do God's work as if you are working for the King? For instance, I believe God has called me to preach His Word to others. I am called to preach God's written Word to those who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ as well as those who have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. What is your work for God? What has God specifically called you or gifted you to do? God gives each Christian a gift and a work to do. For some it is teaching. For others it is music. For some it is to meet the physical needs of others. For some it is hospitality. How faithful are you in doing what God has called you to do?

What about our corporate work for God? What is our work as a church? What does God want this church to do? One simple answer is to fulfill the Great Commission — to make disciples of all nations. Is there anything specific about this, though? One observation about our church and our community is that there are many people in need. There are people who are hurting. There are marriages that are failing or have fallen apart. There are people facing extraordinary challenges with their health or their family. God has placed this church in the center of many people who are in need. Are we doing the work God has called us to do here? Consider the following:

- Are you willing to minister to divorced people or their children?
- Are you willing to visit people who are sick or shut in?

- Are you willing to provide food for those who need it?
- Are you willing to provide transportation for someone who needs it?
- Are you willing to coordinate outreach events that serve the community?
- Are you willing to help clean the church facilities, do yard work, or print materials?
- What about the most important work of all? Are you willing to tell others about Jesus Christ? Will you share your faith with your neighbors, co-workers, or friends? Will you invite people to meet Jesus with you on Sunday morning?

These are just some of the things we can do for the kingdom of God and help those in need around us. What do you need to do to better serve God? Do you need to get out of your comfort zone, maybe? Do you need to show more faith in some area of your life? One need the church has is to have more workers. There is much work God has called us to do but there are few workers available to do it. Jesus' statement about the laborers of the harvest is still true for us today.

Luke 10:2 ² *And he said to them, “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.*

God gave Paul the ministry of reaching those who did not know Jesus Christ. God gave Paul the ministry of planting new churches where none existed. That was Paul's ministry. What is yours? Perhaps God has gifted you to do something for this church. Perhaps God has gifted you to recruit more laborers in the field. Maybe God has gifted you to do something to reach the community around us. If you do not know what that is, maybe you should pray about it. After all, all work for God needs to begin with prayer.

Conclusion

In closing, Paul wrote about the work God had called him to do. Paul was proud of what God had called him to do and what God had accomplished through him. Are we proud of what God is doing through us like Paul was? Are we working for God to help believers become more mature in their faith? Are we working to bring glory to Jesus Christ in all things? Are we working to see more people come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? These were part of Paul's work, and they are part of our work, too. Where do we need to improve in accomplishing what God has called us to do? Do you know what God has called you to do? If not, are you asking God what it is? God does not save people to be bench warmers. He calls us to labor in the field for Him. May we strive to fulfill the work God has called us to do. Thanks be to God. Amen!