

Paul, An Apostle For Christ, Teaches Boldly To A Church Filled with Knowledge, Goodness, And Purity

A famous Methodist evangelist named Peter Cartwright was known for his uncompromising preaching. However, one day when the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson, "*Old rough and ready*," came to Cartwright's church, the elders warned the Pastor not to offend the President. In those days, the President had great power to influence a denomination for good or bad. Content that their Pastor would not say anything to discredit their church, the elders retired to the back of the sanctuary.

When Cartwright got up to speak, the first words out of his mouth were, "I understand that President Andrew Jackson is here this morning. *"I have been requested to be very guarded in my remarks. Let me say this: Andrew Jackson will go to hell if he doesn't repent of his sin!"* The entire congregation gasped with shock at Cartwright's boldness. How could this young preacher dare to offend the tough old general in public, they wondered.

After the service, everyone wondered how the President would respond to Cartwright. When Andrew Jackson met the preacher at the door he looked at him in the eye and said, "*Sir, if I had a regiment of men like you, I could conquer the world!"*

When we appreciate the power of the word of God and the Holy Spirit speaking from the lips of people with conviction we will make eternal differences.

Today we will be looking at Romans 15:14-21, and there is a key word in this passage that we need to take note of, and that word is, "**boldly**," found in verse 15. These verses are written to defend Paul's boldness. This whole section is written to defend the way he has spoken to the Romans. Paul had never been to that church, he didn't found that church, and yet he had spoken to them with boldness. Throughout this epistle Paul had confronted them on some very crucial issues. Such boldness from one they've never met requires some explanation. In fact, this section becomes a justification for boldness on behalf of anyone who speaks of the eternal God.

There is a defense for boldness, and Paul gives that kind of defense right here. The word "*boldness*" means "Not hesitating in the face of danger." It conveys the idea of courage and daring. Certainly this is an appropriate word to describe the apostle, Paul. He was a courageous man. He was a daring man and he had an unusual boldness. He did not back down but spoke with great courage. In Acts 9:27 it says that **he preached boldly** at Damascus. In Acts 13:46 it says that both Paul and Barnabas grew bold in speaking the Word of God. Then in Acts 14:2-3, Luke writes:

2 The Jews who spurned God's message stirred up distrust among the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas, saying all sorts of evil things about them.

3 The apostles stayed there a long time, preaching boldly about the grace of the Lord. The Lord proved their message was true by giving them power to do miraculous signs and wonders.

Acts 19:8:

8 Then Paul went to the synagogue and preached boldly for the next three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God.

The testimony of the Holy Spirit in these passages is that Paul spoke with great courage and boldness, gaining a hearing for the Word of the living God. If when Alan Greenspan speaks everyone listens, ought they not listen even more intently when the eternal God of the universe speaks? This is what Paul is defending then in this part of the epistle to the Romans. Let's now read Romans 15:14-21.

*14 I am fully convinced, dear brothers and sisters, that **you are full of goodness**. **You know** these things so well that **you are able to teach others** all about them.*

*15 Even so, I have been **bold** enough to emphasize some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder from me. For I am, by God's grace,*

*16 a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News and **offer you up as a fragrant sacrifice to God** so that you might be pure and pleasing to him by the Holy Spirit.*

*17 So **it is right for me to be enthusiastic** about all Christ Jesus has done through me in my service to God.*

*18 I dare not boast of anything else. **I have brought the Gentiles to God** by my message and by the way I lived before them.*

*19 **I have won them over by the miracles done through me as signs from God**—all by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ all the way from Jerusalem clear over into Illyricum.*

20 My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else.

21 I have been following the plan spoken of in the Scriptures, where it says, "Those who have never been told about him will see, and those who have never heard of him will understand."

Let's go back and look at Romans chapter six for a moment. Verses 12-14 indicate something of Paul's boldness as he speaks to these Christians at Rome:

12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to its lustful desires.

13 Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you

have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.

14 Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace.

Then in the rest of chapter six Paul tells them that since they have been made free from sin in terms of its dominion over them, they ought to yield themselves as servants to righteousness (verse 16). This is exhortation (urging strongly). We see Paul using it again in Romans 8:9-11:

9 But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all.)

10 Since Christ lives within you, even though your body will die because of sin, your spirit is alive because you have been made right with God.

11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you.

Paul makes the bold statement here that if they do not possess the Spirit of Christ they do not belong to God. Then going down to verse 13:

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die.

Paul is being very direct, very honest, and very bold. Beginning in Romans 11:17 and continuing through verse 26, Paul is speaking of how the Gentiles were included in the grace of God. Paul warns them not to get swelled heads about it. Blindness in part has only happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Paul is telling the Gentiles not to get proud because Israel's been put out and they've been brought into covenant blessing. God is going to one day bring the Jews back in, and if the Gentiles who were not the natural branches were put in when the Jews were broken off, don't think smugly that you are secure, for you too could be broken off by God's justice in the future.

In Romans 12:3, Paul tells them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. In chapter 13 Paul begins to talk about the government and says the rulers are not frightening to those who do good works but to those who do evil. *"If you are doing good, you need not fear the government. If you are doing evil, you should fear the government."* In verse 7 Paul commands them to pay their taxes and pay everyone to whom they have a debt. In verse 8 he tells them they are to owe no one anything but love. That being the one debt that is never paid. In verses 11-14, Paul tells them to get busy walking honestly and not to be involved in wild parties and drunkenness and immorality.

Now some people in the Roman church were certain to raise the question, *"Where does*

this guy get this authority? How is it that he can speak to us in this manner? Where does he get this boldness?" Well in this concluding section beginning in Romans 15:14, having given them his theology, Paul now gives them his heart. First he tells them the reason for his boldness in verses 14-21. Next he tells them his plans for the future in verses 22-33. Then some personal greetings in chapter 16, and finally a benediction. This is very personal stuff that Paul concludes with. So let's begin in Romans 15:14 and see how Paul defends his boldness:

14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

That's a very conciliating statement, isn't it? It took Paul fifteen chapters to get around to the amenities and to speak to the Romans in soothing terms. He begins by saying that he himself, in spite of all that he has written, in spite of calling for obedience and holiness and the doing away with sin, in spite of commanding the pursuit of righteousness and commitment to Christ and the use of their spiritual gifts, and being marked by humility and love without vengeance and retaliation, in spite of calling for submission and the love of the weaker brother and care for each other; in spite of all that, it is Paul's personal opinion that they are good people. In effect Paul is telling them that he knows they will take what he has given them and apply it for the glory of God. So Paul did not have a low opinion of the church at Rome, but a high opinion. This is an example of Christ's words recorded in Matthew 13:11 and 12a, NLT:

Then He explained to them, "You have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others have not. To those who are open to My teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge."

In spite of all his exhortation and warnings, Paul knew they would be obedient to the things he told them. Paul had indicated this right at the beginning of his letter to the Romans in Romans 1:8:

8 Let me say first of all that your faith in God is becoming known throughout the world. How I thank God through Jesus Christ for each one of you.

Paul was commending them at the outset and now commends them again as he closes his letter. Paul has a strong conviction that there are three things true about the people in the Roman church. You may have noticed that in going through the whole Roman epistle, Paul did not have to address any specific sin issue. That is because there wasn't anything that was a glaring concern as was necessary when he wrote to the Galatians or the Corinthians. Paul, therefore, warmly commends them for three things in verse 14. First, he commends them for their goodness. This means that they are rich in moral character, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul is acknowledging the good heart placed within

them at salvation and that they have cultivated that goodness by allowing the Holy Spirit to rule in their lives, just as we are currently studying on Sunday evenings as we look at the book by John Eldredge. If you will remember, the fruit of the Holy Spirit includes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, **goodness**, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. The Romans are therefore enjoying the goodness that is a gift from the Holy Spirit because of their willingness to be obedient. Goodness applies to a Christian with moral excellence; it is an expression of virtue that is opposed to evil. They hated evil and sin, and loved righteousness. They were able to do what Paul spoke of in Romans 12:21:

21 Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.

They were committed to a quality Christian life. That doesn't mean they were without sin, but they were making every effort to follow the lifestyle of Jesus Christ. Paul tells them that they're a good church and he hopes that they can become an even better one.

The second commendation Paul gives is that not only were they filled with goodness but they had **all knowledge**. So they were a good church and they were also doctrinally sound. They were practically applying spiritual knowledge. They knew God. They knew His revealed truth, and they were able to apply that truth to their lives. They had the wonderful balance that God desires of His Church, which is truth and purity, moral excellence and spiritual knowledge. This is a virtual possibility for every believer. By virtue of the Spirit of God which is given to us when we believe in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross on our behalf, we can know true goodness. We can hate sin and love righteousness. We can have the fruit of the Spirit and be filled with all the fruits of righteousness as Paul told the Colossians. We can also have all knowledge, for Christ is to us knowledge and wisdom, and in Him, Paul says to the Colossians, are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We should all have these two things because they are basic to the life of the church. This church had those things: moral excellence and spiritual knowledge.

As a result of that, you'll notice a very important statement at the end of verse 14. Paul says they are able to admonish one another which in effect means **they were able to advise one another**. Paul is telling them that they can function just fine without him. The Greek word used here for *admonish* means to lead someone away from a false path into a true path by warning and teaching.

What the Bible is telling us in this verse is that if you have all knowledge of the revelation of God and your life is full of moral purity, you are competent to advise people what is right and what is wrong.

Everything happens within the fellowship. Now, in chapters 12—15:13, Paul has just described a **perfect church**. This is how things should be and could be if everybody allowed the Bible to guide every decision in life. I, however, have yet to experience a church where everyone behaves this way. There may have been some churches like this at one time and there may be a few around today. But certainly, most people who are part

of the church as it exists today do not have the qualifications to counsel anyone. Rather, those who feel they need it should seek good Christian counseling from a trained professional.

It is true that in the time of Paul there were no psychologists and psychiatrists. And it is not hard to see that in a healthy church which is practicing the disciplines discussed here by Paul, people could be capable of counseling one another under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. The problem, unfortunately, is that most churches today do not have the kind of purity Paul told the Roman church they had. If that is the case, the people in such churches have no business counseling anybody.

It's my personal opinion that counseling by a Christian psychologist, who is practicing what Paul suggests spiritually, is your best opportunity for receiving help with a wide variety of emotional problems. My experience, however, with secular psychologists suggests to me that long term benefits are minimal. As a committed Christian, I could not in good conscience recommend a secular psychologist or any other counselor who does not have a committed relationship to Jesus Christ, although there might be some exceptions. So if you have an opportunity to work with a good Christian psychologist like Betty, there is an excellent possibility for progress with emotional problems.

And if you belong to a church like Village Church, you can be assured that we are striving to be the kind of church Paul describes in Romans 15:14, whose members are capable of providing good counsel for one another in many areas of life. But when it comes to the heavyweight emotional problems that many people in a sinful world struggle with, your best resource is a competent Christian professional psychologist. If you feel you need help with emotional problems, your pastor should be equipped to provide recommendations for qualified counselors on both a spiritual and emotional level. I believe we are equipped to provide you with that kind of help here at Village Church if you request it.

Now if the Roman church that Paul is writing to is such a good church, why did Paul write them this extensive letter? Let's look at verse 15 and find out. Romans 15:15:

*15 Even so, I have been bold enough to emphasize some of these points, knowing that all you need is **this reminder** from me.*

Paul says he wrote the letter to the Romans because God made Him do it. Paul wrote the letter because God wanted him to remind the Romans of these things. He knows their spiritual quality and knows that they're not all they could be, so he wants to remind them of the importance of pursuing these things. He wrote to the Romans not to tell them something they didn't know but to remind them of the things they did know.

Any good teacher knows **two things**. Two things that you have to recognize in teaching are forgetfulness and repetition. The principle of **forgetfulness** states that what we have said in the past, you have for the most part forgotten. We don't like that principle, but it is

true. Human beings forget 90% of what they just hear. If we were to quiz you on last week's sermon, how many of you think you could answer half the questions correctly? If you think you can, and you're able to do so, my ego would go right into orbit.

But we know that most of what we've said you've forgotten. And do you know how we know that? Because we've also forgotten what we've said. Any good teacher knows therefore that you must **repeat things**. That's why we find a repetition of many great truths in the teachings of Jesus. It is the same with Paul. His epistles intersect over and over again with **the same truths**. So it is important for a teacher to remember forgetfulness.

The second thing you have to understand is the need for **repetition** with creativity. In reminding people, you cannot say things in the same way you've always said them or they won't hear them. So the challenge of teaching is to repeat the same things over and over again in various creative ways so as to keep the interest and attention of the listeners. So Paul tells them of the necessity to **remind them** of what **they already know**.

Paul says the reason he keeps doing this is because of the grace given to him by God. God has called him to do this. Paul was under divine orders to write this letter. Paul didn't do it on his own because he thought the Romans needed it. He was called to do it by God. Do you remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:9,10?

9 For I am the least of all the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted the church of God.

*10 But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than all the other apostles, yet **it was not I but God** who was working through me by his grace.*

The thing that activated Paul's ministry was God pouring out His grace on Paul. By that he means the power and flow of the energy of God that compelled Paul to serve, and Paul saw this as grace because he did not deserve it and was unworthy of it.

So when Paul speaks to the Romans he's telling them that the reason he's spoken to them more boldly than they might have expected is because there is a grace of God filling his life that compels him to speak the way he speaks. I can understand the compulsion of ministry and of what Paul had in mind in 2 Corinthians 5:14, where he says:

14 Whatever we do, it is because Christ's love controls us.

I also understand what he means in 2 Corinthians 5:11, where Paul writes:

11 It is because we know this solemn fear of the Lord that we work so hard

to persuade others.

Or 1 Corinthians 9:16:

*16 For preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. **I am compelled by God to do it.** How terrible for me if I didn't do it!*

Any believer should feel the very same way regarding whatever their spiritual gift might be. For all of us have been given gifts from the Spirit of God, which the Spirit of God by grace expects each believer to use. A committed Christian understands that duty. In defense of his boldness Paul says, “*I’m under orders to be this firm about the things I’ve written you.*” After all, Paul didn’t write Romans on his own. He was led to write it by the Holy Spirit of God. What does Paul say in the very first verse of the very first chapter of Romans? Romans 1:1:

I Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

Then in verse 5:

5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name.

Paul has a duty to speak on behalf of the Lord. Now, after introducing his apostolic calling, we find in Romans 15:16-20 that Paul does a wonderful thing. He defines that apostolic office as a three-fold role:

- 1) Paul the priest
- 2) Paul the preacher
- 3) Paul the pioneer

Paul introduces himself as a priest, a preacher, and a pioneer. These things sum up the call of God that compelled him to be an apostle and to write the epistle to the Romans.

Paul sees his office as analogous (comparable) to that of a priest. Please notice the choice of words. He is not in strict definition a priest, but his role is analogous to a priest.

Romans 15:15,16:

*15 For I am, by God's grace,
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 is saying that God has called him to be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. The key to understanding this particular point is to understand the term *minister*, which most often refers to sacred worship or service. And that is the proper use of it in this text. The statement, “*ministering the gospel of God,*” solidifies the priestly interpretation of the word *minister*. The New American Standard and the New International Version

translations of this passage include the word *priest*. The Jews in Paul's audience would understand and relate to the concept of "*priest*." They would understand that Paul is using the word to describe his role as someone who prayed for them and who brought them God's Word. So Paul is a priest of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, serving as a priest in the gospel of God. Now this is not to say that Paul is an actual priest, a member of the priesthood. As we learn in the book of Hebrews, especially Hebrews 7:21-25, that was done away with through the ministry of Christ. All believers are now priests. 1 Peter 2:4, 5:

*4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and
5 like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a **holy priesthood**, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Verse 9:

*9 But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

All believers are priests. Believers do not have to go through some other human person to get to God. All believers have ready access to the throne room of God. We do not need priests to get to God. 1 Timothy 2:5:

5 For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human.

To continue to maintain the need for a formal priesthood of men is a misrepresentation of the priesthood of believers and goes against what the Word of God calls us to do. So Paul is not a priest that makes atonement for sin. He's not a priest who offers sacrifices. He's not a priest who mediates between God and man. The imagery in verse 16 is terrific because the primary job of the priest in the Old Testament temple was to offer up sacrifices to God. Here is Paul serving in a priestly role, standing before the altar of God, and he has in his hands an offering, and the offering is the Gentiles. The Gentiles who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit and made acceptable to God. These are saved Gentiles. When Paul was called into the ministry he was told he was going to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He went out and won Gentiles to Christ and like a priest he offers them to Christ. Gentiles are Paul's act of worship.

You and I as priests can offer God an offering as well. We can offer Him the offering of the souls we've led to Jesus Christ. We can do that because these people have been sanctified, made holy by the Holy Spirit of God (Titus 3:4-7). What are you offering to God? Are there lives that you can offer to God? There is no feeling that can match the one you'll have when by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit within you, a new believer comes to Christ. Why was Paul so bold? Because he lived to be used to offer up redeemed souls to God as his supreme act of worship. May we follow his

example of sanctified boldness.