

Obedience and the Presence of God

Romans Session 53

Romans 15:15

15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on *some* points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,

This was preceded by **verse 14**, where Paul commends them for being full of goodness. Lesson: you never get so good that you don't need reminders. Like, all the time.

Romans 15:16

16 that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

The offering if the Gentiles. Ever thought of yourself in that way?

Romans 15:17

17 Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things *which pertain* to God.

Paul is excited about the results of his efforts. What he does, all of his labors, it all adds up to an offering unto the Lord. And that's what your work and mine are as well.

Romans 15:18

18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—

No third person anecdotes from Paul. He's got some amazing experiences. Things he's excited about. Things he wants to share with others, and to do so in a spirit of glorying in Christ. He goes on to describe very briefly what's been going on in his life.

Romans 15:19

19 in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

Signs and wonders—no, excuse me—MIGHTY signs and wonders were accomplished through Paul. He's

not bragging. He's just reporting what happened. But notice for a moment the end goal in all of these things taking place—

Romans 15:18b

“...to make the Gentiles obedient—”

Now just for a moment I want to address those of you who are involved in ministry. I don't mean formal ministry, necessarily. You know, like it's your job or something.

But you are involved in other people's lives in terms of spiritual things. Where you teach, or disciple, or counsel, or just try to edify your brother or sister over a cup of tea or coffee.

You remember the last couple of weeks, right? We've been talking about edifying one another. So tell me—if you've been listening—what does the word “**edify**” mean? **TO BUILD UP**.

And I want you to understand: you are involved in ministry if you make a point of edifying your fellow believers. And the end game in contributing to the spiritual lives of others...the end game is very simple. It's the same as Paul's.

Let's read it again. “**To make the Gentiles obedient.**” Obedient to whom? To God, of course. If you have edified another person, what you have done is to help them to increase their obedience to God.

Now right away, someone is thinking, “***I'm not disobedient to God. I don't smoke, I don't chew, I don't date girls that do,***” as the old saying goes. And I get it.

Many of you probably got to the point where you thought you had it pretty much together after being a Christian for a while. All of the old sins had been confessed and repented of. The bad habits had been overcome.

All the outward stuff was pretty much under control. It had actually been quite a while since you did something even **slightly** illegal.

But God was just getting started. Then He started showing you things about your inner life. Thoughts and motives that were displeasing to Him.

Not to bore you with a list of what such things might be. I'm just reminding you that God is in the business of perfecting your character and mine. And trust me—He's got His hands full when taking that on.

My point is this, especially if you've been a Christian for a long time. There is still lots of growing for you to do. Deeper levels of obedience to God. And that is the point of edifying each other, is it not? To help one another be better obey-ers.

In fact, I think that might be worthy to adopt as a lifelong goal. To keep on improving on your obedience, and to strive to help others to do the same. And if you'll do that, I'll let you in on a little secret, OK? It's from something Jesus said.

John 8:29

And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for *I always do those things that please Him.*

Now slow down your thinking for just a moment, and let those words linger in your mind. Don't miss the obvious connection that is there for application to our lives. This is not only for Jesus. The principle he alludes to here is for us as well. Jesus is our pattern to follow, and this is one of the most important parts of His example to emulate.

He who sent Me is with Me.

What is that saying theologically? Well, first of all, it indicates that Jesus was sent. Obviously it also implies that He went where He was sent. Or to put it another way...

HE WAS WHERE HE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE.

And then what else happened here in John 8? Jesus said this: *I always do those things that please Him.* Or to put it another way...

HE DID WHAT HE WAS SUPPOSED TO DO.

So if you've been around here for any length of time, you probably know where I'm headed with this. I mention this principle at least once a month in my sermons. And take it to heart, please. Because it has

the potential to change your life dramatically, if you haven't tried it before.

"BE WHERE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE, AND DO WHAT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO DO."

That is the simplest way to describe obedience that I know of. And there is an amazing and wonderful payoff for that laid out for us by Jesus. It's still up on the screen.

The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.

Be where you're supposed to be. Do what you're supposed to do. And God will be with you. And you can't get by in the Christian life without that. Moses knew that. He knew that without the presence of God, there was just no chance of things working out.

Exodus 33:14-15

14 And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

15 Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here."

16 For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth."

It makes a noticeable difference in a person's life. When they are obedient, when God is pleased with them and draws near to them on that basis.

You remember that old song, "***What the world needs now is love sweet love?***" Well that's a nice thought, but it's not really what the world needs the most. You know what the biggest need of the world is—short of salvation itself? What the world needs now are bunch of very obedient Christians who have God with them and upon them in the way we're speaking of right now. His presence with you makes your words and your deeds carry an impact that would otherwise not be there.

So let's go back to what Paul says in Romans 15 and try to make it applicable to our own lives, shall we? One more time from Romans 15:

Romans 15:18-19

18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—

19 in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

Now I don't know about the signs and wonders thing. That's more for somebody more like Paul, which is to say, an Apostle. Obviously the signs and wonders that were done by the Apostles were done to a great extent for validation of the authority that was vested in them for the faith.

But that is not to say that God won't do supernatural things through the likes of us on occasion. Not to validate us, but just because He is merciful and gracious. And generally this sort of thing is done in response to prayer. As we pray for others, I believe we can believe for miracles to happen. I know there are some in this room right now who have experienced God's miraculous touch.

But signs and wonders aren't our bread and butter as disciples. Not like it was for the Apostles. But I guarantee you, supernaturally enhanced words and deeds are. Paul sets those two things forth in **verse 18** as being part and parcel of his ministry. And they are definitely to be part of ours.

Here's the deal: what you say and what you do can play a significant role in bringing some non-believer to the place of surrender and obedience to God. And your words and your deeds can certainly enhance the obedience of other Christians.

And how can that be? It works by the same principle that was at work in Paul's life.

"By the power of the Spirit of God." So remember, we've been talking about obedience. And your commitment to be obedient to Christ—even in the face of trials and temptations and discouragement and whatever it is that might come against you—your commitment to be obedient to Christ is an invitation for God's presence to be with you.

Think about that often. Apply it to your life. Disobedience carries a high price tag for a Christian.

Distance between our soul and the Lord is a terrible burden. Obey—even when it's inconvenient. Obey—even when you're all out of motivation. Obey—even when life doesn't seem fair. Obey, and bask in the favor and presence of the Lord.

That's how the Christian life is supposed to be lived. Not with a list of rules—though I've got nothing against rules. But the Spirit of the Lord—His presence that hovers over our lives—is the greatest gift in this regard. It is—in a very real way—your heritage.

You were born again by the Spirit of God. And you are privileged to live a life that is empowered by that same Spirit.

In contrast to this, I'm reminded of Esau.

Hebrews 12:14-16

14 Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

16 lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

The warning we get from Esau's example is this: as unthinkable as it might seem when you are on top of things, it's entirely possible to sell out cheaply when we are tired, discouraged, and what have you.

But stay obedient to God, no matter what. Be where you're supposed to be, do what you're supposed to do. Your heritage as a believer is so valuable. Do not lose sight of that. His presence with you is worth everything.

Romans 8:15-17

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

You live in that reality when God draws near. Living at a distance from God is a lousy way to live.

Obedience is crucial. He is a holy God. His Spirit is the Holy Spirit. And fellowship in the Spirit is worth more than anything. Remember that, when next you feel like wandering from the path of righteousness.

Alright, enough of that. But as I said earlier, none of us ever get so good that we don't need reminders. Just consider this a friendly reminder. I don't want to beat anybody over the head with this stuff. I'm trying to edify you, and that's all.

Romans 15:20-26

20 And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,

21 but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand."

22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.

So Paul has been pretty tied up getting the message out to areas where the Gospel had not been preached. That's where he was supposed to be, don't you know. But he's always had these Roman Christians on his heart, and now it looks like he just might make it out their way.

Romans 15:23-24

23 But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you,

24 whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while.

So he's still looking past them, and to areas that haven't been reached with the gospel yet. Evidently Spain was unevangelized, and Paul fully intended to make it out there. And he plans on stopping by Rome for a face to face meeting with the church. But before he can do any of that, he's got another stop to make.

Romans 15:25-27

25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.

26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

Paul had so many irons in the fire. Here he's going to go on a charitable mission back to Israel. Money had been collected from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to be sent to the poor Christians in Israel. Lots of economic hardship for Jewish Christians back then.

Interesting that Paul viewed the Gentiles as being debtors to the Jews, because of the Gentiles' inclusion in Israel's spiritual blessings. So it was their duty to send relief.

Romans 15:28-29

28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.

29 But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

That's quite the statement in **verse 29**. I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. What does that even mean?

Well, what is the gospel? It is the power of God unto salvation. But these folks were already saved, so was Paul speaking of reaching the non-believers there? I don't think so. He would of course evangelize, but his main focus is on strengthening the church.

But remember, the gospel of Christ is simply the good news about Christ. So he was coming to unveil some more of the good news about Jesus. Going deeper than they had gone before. Learning some new things. Getting a better understanding of what they had already begun to learn.

Let me put it this way—all that we teach in a church should be full of good news about Jesus. Because in the end, it's all about Jesus. Because Jesus is everything to us. Literally.

I Corinthians 1:30-31

30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—
31 that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

To obey God is how we experience more and more *the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.*

And Paul was planning on coming in the *fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.* Meaning what, exactly?

Well, I can't say exactly. But I have a strong suspicion that it was possible because Paul was consistently obedient. Being where he was supposed to be and doing what he was supposed to do.

And speaking of doing, now he has something specific for the Roman Christians to do for him.

Romans 15:30-33

30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,
31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,
32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.
33 Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.

He wanted their prayers. He needed their prayers. He knew that he would be targeted by the unconverted Jews in Jerusalem. And in fact, that did occur and Paul was arrested and ultimately ended up in Rome. Not quite in the way that he anticipated, but he got to see the church in Rome nonetheless.

Alright, we're done for today. We'll finish up the book of Romans in 2 weeks. But next Sunday on November 30th, we'll have be talking about being thankful.

But for today, we have plenty to be thankful for. Just think of all the inspiring truths we have read over the last year, as the Apostle Paul laid out the gospel for us in this wonderful book of Romans.

And this week, let me just encourage you to think often of the value of obedience and the blessings that follow in its train.