

Romans 15:17-16:16

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[0 : 0 0] So Romans chapter 15, and we'll read from verse 17 to 16, verse 16. Romans chapter 15 at verse 17.

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.

So from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Rather, as it is written, those who were not told about him will see and those who have not heard will understand. This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

[1 : 2 1] Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.

The God of peace be with you all. Amen. I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in King Chira. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

[2 : 5 0] Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my friend Eponetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

Greet Andronicus and Junius, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ. Greet my dear friend Stachys, greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ.

Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodian, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.

[3 : 49] Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me too. Greet Asencritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them.

Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympus, and all the saints with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ send greetings. Amen. I do hope you've had a good time this afternoon, a blessed time, to just rest and be refreshed.

And I pray that it will be a good time for us again around God's Word this evening. Can I just invite you to open up where James has read from in the book of Romans from chapter 15.

[4 : 49] We're going to be looking the second half of verse 19. And so the bit that says, so from Jerusalem, to that section in chapter 16. So we're going to pick up this evening at the point where Paul had left us earlier on in verse 19.

And it seems like he was giving inspiration to the wonderful Disney and Pixar character Buzz Lightyear. He gets to a section and it's like, to infinity and beyond, church. That is where we are going.

Into the future we are going to the ends of the earth. Because the grace that has been revealed through our Lord Jesus, the beauty of this gospel, is not something which is to be contained.

Flowing out from that grace, we saw that God was fulfilling his promises. But he was also creating new communities of people. Outposts, signposts for the kingdom of God.

Friends, the grace of God in Jesus Christ creates transnational, supernatural communities which are growing all over the world.

[5 : 58] That is what is taking place. That is what Paul saw in his ministry. That is why he's so excited and wants to encourage the church in Rome. These are transnational, supernatural communities which are spreading because this gospel is untamable.

Because the God of the gospel is untamable. So we're going to just gather our thoughts under three headings. The first of which is the ministry of God's people, part two.

So if you were here for part one, exciting times. If you were not here for part one, well you get part two and you just get the last of the three Ps that sum up that section. Firstly, there had been priestly ministry that the apostle was involved in.

There was powerful ministry because of the gospel. But also ministry in the gospel is often pioneering. The ministry of the gospel is something which is pioneering.

Now not all of us get excited with geography. Some of us might have loved it at school. Some of us may even have went to the university here and studied geography. But for some of us, the thought of looking at a map fills us with fear because we've got no idea which country we're even in ourselves.

[7 : 09] Or it potentially throws up to us this concept of boredom like, I don't need to know. I'm here. The countries and the nations are there. Well, we're not going to find out whether the phobia of geography or the boredom that comes with geography is your bent this evening.

What is important to understand is what Paul is saying in this section about the places that he has been. Okay? The places that he has been are very, very important.

Now let's clear something up. In that section, Paul has seemed to have said, well, the gospel has been fully proclaimed. There's no need for me to be here anymore. That's what it seems to say in that second half of verse 19.

From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It seems to be, well, you know, everyone's a Christian now, aren't they? Fully proclaimed the gospel. Well, no, that's not what he means when he says that.

What he is saying is that there are churches in these areas. There are outposts of the kingdom of God which have been established here. There are people who have come to trust in Jesus Christ.

[8 : 12] And these churches are seeking to evangelize those who live around about them. And they are also seeking to establish new communities, new supernatural communities empowered by the Holy Spirit to conform to the image of Christ as they receive the word of God.

In shorthand, he's saying there's churches in these areas. There are people who know something of Christ. And these churches are getting on with that ministry.

It's a good job well done. But that's not enough for Paul. Paul effectively says, no, no, no, we need to keep going now.

We can't just stop where we are. We need to keep going. We need to keep pushing forward. We need to keep taking this message of the gospel of Christ because Christ must be heard. So that God is glorified by everything and everyone that he has made.

The gospel doesn't just stop when we've got a couple of good things to show for it. The gospel pushes forward. And that is what Paul is super excited about in this letter to the Romans.

[9 : 19] He wants them to see that this gospel of grace for the world cannot just stop at Rome. It cannot just stop in Corinth. It cannot stop in Jerusalem. It has to go to the ends of the earth.

So why is he speaking about Jerusalem and Illyricum? It's actually very bold and audacious when you begin to understand the geography that he's talking about.

He is effectively saying that the four prefectures of the Roman Empire, the four divisions that the Roman Empire was put into, he says there's churches in the furthest east where Jerusalem is representative.

In Illyricum, I have spent ministry and there are churches which are based there. You're in the province of Italia in Rome that covers the north of Africa and the whole of Italy. We're going to the last frontier.

We're going to the last prefecture because this is where Christ needs to be seen. This is where Christ has not been made known yet. And we're going there. I'm going there because the gospel has not been heard.

[10 : 22] The spirit of pioneering new works of the gospel is something which should characterize the ministry of God's people locally and globally. We should not be content because there are some nice things for us to point to and say, isn't that amazing?

We should rejoice in that and we should be encouraged by that. But that encouragement should fuel us to taking that gospel to the next places where Christ has not been honored, where Christ has not been proclaimed.

We want to see the unreached come to hear about Christ because we know that this is what thrills God's heart. Those who are not told about him will see.

And those who have not heard will understand. When believers are convinced that the earth is the Lord's and that there is only one mediator between people and God, they will passionately pursue preaching Christ in pioneering ways and situations so that those who do not know will hear and that those who have never come in contact with the gospel before will have that opportunity to hear about God and to see something of his glory.

A couple of years ago, I was in China and I was able to go to a region where Tibetan Buddhism is the predominant religion.

[11 : 43] And that is the thing which shapes the culture. I'm going to read to you something of a biography from someone who had been involved in ministry in this place. A man called Frank Lerner.

And he says this, My call, for I can use no other word, was heard while on a visit to the Kumbom Lama Sury. I'd taken tracts and gospels with me, but I had a very limited knowledge of the Tibetan language then, and the attempt to impart the great message to the Lama's understanding seemed very feeble.

One afternoon, feeling burdened with a sense of their need, I walked up a hill at the back of the Lama Sury. Sitting on the grassy slopes, I gazed at the mountains which separate China from Tibet.

Their peaks were sparkling in the afternoon sun, and as my eyes rested on the purity of their whiteness, the question, but what is beyond, thrust itself upon me. I thought of the millions of lips uttering meaningless prayers, millions of bodies daily bowed in frustrations, millions of people awaiting the blessing of men who call themselves incarnate Buddhas, and so little was being done to bring the light to them.

And suddenly it seemed as if a voice was speaking. I want you to do something for these people. I went up the back of that same hill and looked out across that same monastery, and still to this day, there is no active, flourishing witness to the gospel among these people, nearly a hundred years later.

[13 : 20] Who is willing to go so that the earth will resound to the praise of God's glory? Who is willing to sacrifice all of these comforts that we have in our everyday life so that these many, many millions of Tibetans will have an opportunity to respond to Jesus Christ?

Do you know what we did when we sat looking out across that monastery? We sung that wonderful song, And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood?

Who will go? So what are the ways that we can be pioneers in this great city of Edinburgh? This is something for us.

I'm not going to give you the answers, because I'll be honest, I don't have the answers. The takeaway for this is really a case of what are we thinking through? What are the things we can do in terms of pioneering ministry in this great city of Edinburgh?

Which communities don't have a gospel church? Which ethnic minorities or religious groups that exist in this great city have little to no concept of the gospel and have little to no access to disciples of Jesus Christ?

[14 : 38] Take the wider angle then. Who is being raised up in this church to pioneer ministry in other parts of Scotland, in other parts of Edinburgh, in other parts of the world?

Because that is one of the markers of a church which is healthy and which is growing, is that there is this desire to see people raised up within it to proclaim Christ locally, nationally, globally.

Identify them. Love them. Allow them like me to make all the mistakes in the world and just love them through that.

Train them up. Show them the way that they should go and send them off as a blessing to bless and to announce Christ wherever it is he takes them. So that is the second section that comes in with the ministry of God's people is this idea of a pioneering ministry.

But there is also a root that comes with our zeal. We were through in Edinburgh recently to see In the Night Garden live. I don't know how many people know about In the Night Garden, about Iggle Piggle and the Ninky Nonk and the Pinky Ponk.

[15 : 55] But it is great fun and that's the season of life that I find myself in now. And Sophia wanted a helium balloon of the Pinky Ponk. And, you know, the balloon cost eight pounds so I was making sure this balloon was nailed down to the pram.

It was not flying off across the Edinburgh skyline. It needed to be rooted so that it didn't meander off, so that it didn't just go floating away off into the sunset.

And Paul, even though he was passionate to get to Spain, to that last prefecture of the empire that didn't have a church, is someone who had a rooted zeal. He was passionate, but it didn't mean that he just went and did his own thing.

His zeal was not at the expense of real relationships with other believers. You see that so plainly. I plan, verse 24, I plan to do so when I go to Spain.

I hope to visit you while passing through having a relationship with the church in Rome and to have you assist me on my journey. After a while, I'll enjoy your company. Now, however, I'm on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.

[16 : 59] He has not sacrificed real relationships as a result of his passion and his zeal. No, Paul was tethered to the church, longing to see his fellow believers in Jerusalem encouraged through the financial gifts of other churches which had been established through his ministry.

You see, gospel ministry is zeal with a root. Yes, in Christ, absolutely. We are not denying that or taking away from it, but it is also rooted in the people of God.

It is rooted in Christ's people as well. Do you grow cold towards the church? The number of times I have conversations with people, either believers or non-believers, and it is the church which comes under the greatest amount of criticism.

The church is what gets in the way of mission, is what I hear far too often, and that is wrong. Because God has a church for his mission.

We do not replace the church with our own exciting, passionate ideas for zeal. Yes, there can be challenges, but please don't let them lead you to become cold, cynical, and self-determining in your heart that God has given me this thing to do, and I'm going to do the thing.

[18 : 22] The church was bought with the blood of Christ, and it is the church which will be presented to Christ as his bride perfected on the last day. The church is his inheritance, the inheritance of nations.

Being a pioneer in ministry doesn't mean being a lone ranger. Having a great idea to see something new happen in Edinburgh or the ends of the earth doesn't mean that you just go ahead and do it.

Being a pioneer in ministry is coming to the church leaders and to your elders and saying, guys, have we thought about this? This is profoundly counter-cultural in the Western world where our identity is asserted.

We tell people who we are. We tell people what we will do. Where we determine who we are, what we'll do, that is the way that our identity is constructed in the Western world.

And what Paul is saying is profoundly counter-cultural for our day and age. And yet, this is a wonderful window through which people can marvel at the gospel of God's grace in Christ, does it not?

[19 : 31] You have this great zeal, this great passion, but you are willing to come in humility and submission to people and work this together and not just blaze your own trail, do your own thing, and actually kind of take the glory for yourself instead of coming together as the people of God and saying, all glory be to Christ, our King, all glory be to Christ.

are we willing to be an accountable and encouraging people?

Not cynical, not critical of the bride of Christ. Always remember that phrase when you start with the axe on the church. To come as an encouraging people, but to come as an accountable people.

Longing to see the church encouraged, longing to see people grow in their faith relationship with the Lord Jesus as they are held accountable.

Having a rooted zeal, a real relationship with God and a real relationship with his people means that we will desire to pray and to see the gospel move forward.

[20 : 46] You see that in that section, verse 30 to 33. He's rooted in the local church, but that rootedness, that zealous rootedness also leads us, it drives us to want to pray and to bring the challenges, the joys, the whatever it is before God.

And it's only when we have that real relationship with God and we have that real relationship with others that we will ever get into the place where we do not see this praying for the church, praying for the mission of God, praying for his people as a burden.

It will become a delight because we know that we are then serving together side by side, not one person being really important and the rest of us kind of just being here. No, we are the people of God involved in the mission of God to see his glory extended to the ends of the earth, which means that there's not somebody who's superior or inferior in many ways.

Where these relationships with God and his people are cold or non-existent, then prayer at best usually becomes ritualistic and at worst it becomes non-existent.

Prayer overflows from a rooted passion to see the kingdom of God grow and for his people to be effective ambassadors in his hands. It's one of my great concerns, I have to be honest, spending time going to different churches in Scotland from different traditions.

[22 : 15] And this is something that's probably aimed more at people who are my sort of age and stage, maybe about 10 or 15 years older and younger than me. What's gonna happen when all of these people who are over their 70s are no longer here and there with the Lord and glory?

The people who have prayed, the people who commit these things to the Lord and yet so often I have to confess, I see in my generation a real lack of wanting to bring these things before the Lord in prayer.

Deeply rooted prayer. You see, your church leaders need your prayers. Your pastor needs your prayers.

Your mission partners need your prayers, your fellow believers sitting next to you right now. They need your prayers. Sometimes in the UK society, we are so bad at actually just saying, I really need you to pray for this because we have to tick a box of some sort of conformity to kind of, you know, not causing people a bit of offense or not really getting in their way.

Guys, drop that. We need each other to pray for each other so that that amazing message of the gospel goes throughout the whole world. Being rooted in the church community locally and globally will see us overflow into believing prayer.

[23 : 38] Knowing that this God of peace, knowing that the God of peace will work in accordance to his perfect will to fulfill his mission amongst all peoples.

Are you rooted? Are you rooted? Are you rooted in Christ? Are you rooted in his church?

What do you pray for? What are the things that you pray for? And leading on from that, who do you pray for?

Who do you spend time committed before God and saying, I am praying for X person in their challenges? I urge you brothers by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Who do you pray for? And what do you pray for? Now finally, we see this, we see a wonderful example in chapter 16 of unity and diversity.

[24 : 47] Paul effectively goes through a list of lots of different people and he actually highlights just what he's been talking about in these last few verses. That the gospel brings unity even though we are very different from each other.

It's a delightful picture of what Paul has been reminding the church in Rome about. So many people, so many from different places, different working backgrounds, different cultural heritages, but perhaps one of the most wonderful and countercultural things to note is the important place that Paul gives in thanking the women in the church.

They are not a subclass human as would have been the case in that day. They were equally valued, equally loved by God in Christ.

Nine out of the 26 people mentioned are women in this section and they have served side by side, yes, in different ways in seeing the gospel cross boundaries and cross barriers.

Now let me be clear, I hold to the same complementarian perspective that we do as a church. But something I'm always challenged about reading this section is this, how do I seek to encourage sisters in Christ to love and good works as fellow partners in the gospel?

[26 : 09] How does Martin seek to encourage the many sisters that he has spent time with? and say, do you know what? Go on to love and good works.

I really want to encourage you to see these things through in your work, with your family, wherever it is that God has placed you in your life.

Can I just pray for you? What are the ways that I'm seeking to encourage the many gifted women that I know in ways that they know they are valued?

not just filling in something that I don't want to do as a man. One thing that we can be sure of from this section is that Paul is not the chauvinist of popular culture.

He often gets characterized as someone who hated women and he's demonized in many sections of thinking that he just hated women. He had nothing good to say about them.

[27 : 13] Oh, clearly, people have never read this section. And it should be something that is not found in the church of Christ. Women are equally loved and known by God.

Fallen, broken people just like men. What am I doing to encourage? What is it that we are doing to encourage the sisters in our congregation, brothers?

Yes, there are things which are not appropriate. We know that. The Bible is clear about that. But what are ways that we are seeking to encourage our fellow sisters in Christ?

What ways do you seek to enable your sisters to be released for good works? Something that's really challenged me recently is stepping back and saying, no, do you know what, Jennifer? I'm going to stay in so that you can go out and do this.

What? Sisters, you are known and loved by God. He knows you.

[28 : 17] He loves you. He cares for you. Press on with us to love and good works as we seek to announce Christ together, whether that's in our offices, whether that's in the toddler room, whether that's in the lecture hall, wherever it is that you find yourself to have been placed by God, lets each of us seek to move forward, enabled by God in the Spirit, into love and good works.

And as we do this together, living in such unity, affirming our diversity, saying, yes, there is differences here because that is something which as the church we need to affirm.

There is difference. difference. But that difference does not mean disharmony and disunity. As we move forward in unity, an onlooking world cannot help but asking, why do you guys love each other so much and why do you love each other in this way?

We look out at our society and it just seems not to make sense. But you guys seem to get this and you seek to move forward together and seek to love each other. Is that not the door that we are waiting to see opened up?

Somebody saying, why is it that you do this? I mean, that's like gospel goals, isn't it? Why do you do this? Well, there's a guy called Jesus, by the way, and he changes everything.

[29 : 49] Can I tell you a little bit about him? Can I tell you a little bit about him? The church is a supernatural community drawing together a disparate group to reflect, to display, and announce the kingdom which is to come.

This was the pattern of the early church. This was the way that things worked. This is why they penetrated and permeated so many different aspects of the Roman world because when disease broke out, the believers didn't flee the cities where the disease was.

No, some of them remained and they sought to serve and some of them died as a result of remaining to serve. When believers were persecuted, they didn't respond with warfare or revolution.

They prayed for those who were nailing them down and they were praying for those who were signing the arrest and death warrants and they were praying for the person who was holding the sword above their head.

And in the middle of Rome's empire, filled with all of the ethnic tensions that there were at that time, the church was the first place in the world where all of the common social markers which caused division were brought down.

[30 : 59] Because in Christ, there is one new humanity. In Christ, there is one people of God and in Christ alone, the mission of God will move forward to the praise of His glory and grace.

You see, these are the sort of churches that the Lord Jesus desires to see. Churches which are united behind the gospel, seeking to spur each other on to love and to good works, to proclaim and display that gospel to the ends of the earth.

And that is what Paul desires to see in the church in Rome. Because remember, what is it that Paul is saying to them? I'm writing these things, telling you about the obedience that comes by faith for the Gentiles.

And the reason I'm saying these things is because there is still a section of the Gentiles in the Roman world which is yet to be reached. Are you united behind the gospel?

And in your unity behind the gospel, send me to Spain so that when I come to you and we have fellowship together and I encourage you with the gospel, you see, you hear, and you say, Paul, we will send you to the last place on earth where there has not been someone to speak about Jesus.

[32 : 13] Paul is passionate to get to Spain because Paul is passionate about the God of glory who has come in Jesus Christ to display grace upon grace.

The one who has loved him and who has given himself for him. Friends, we are supernatural communities. Our communities are transnational communities.

Our ministry is to be marked with a pioneering spirit that we want to see the gospel dig down into every aspect of life because Christ deserves the glory and the honor and the praise.

We want to make sure that we are rooted even in our zeal so that we are not just going off and doing our own thing. And we want to be people who are united in our diversity. Christ delights to see his people diverse and disparate as they are, broken sinners from all corners of the earth coming before him, praising his name because he has brought them to unity with himself.