

43. Five characteristics of a godly ministry

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With the last week's study, we finished the doctrinal and applicational study portion of the Book of Romans. From here, apostle Paul marks the beginning of the conclusion of the Book. Interestingly, he devoted more space to his closing words in Romans than in any other of his letters.

Paul talks about himself, his future plans and offers a prayer, many greetings and a final warning. Since he doesn't talk about himself that much in his epistles, whenever he briefly mentions about himself, we cling to his words to find about this godly giant in a small, unimpressive statue. In this last section of the Book of Romans we can almost hear the heartbeat of an old missionary apostle who was about to shake the world to the core with the power of Jesus Christ his Savior.

To understand the center of apostle Paul's ministry, we need to trace back his life a little bit. Apostle Paul had a previous name – Saul and he was from the city of Tarsus which was located in modern day Turkey. He was one hardcore rabbi, Pharisee, Jewish nationalist and Christ hater. He hated the followers of Jesus Christ so much that he actually thought he was doing God a favor by killing Christians and dragging them to prison.

He even received a sanction by the high priest of Israel to arrest any of these Christians from Damascus, Syria to haul them back to Jerusalem to execute them. On the way to Damascus, the Lord Jesus had a personal close encounter with Saul and knocked him off his high horse literally. When Jesus made Himself known to Saul and changed his name to Paul, this newly appointed apostle became the most dangerous person against Judaism in history.

By the grace of God, Paul was saved, he was delivered from wretch to glory, from spiritual poverty to heavenly riches, from worshiping a religion to worshiping the real God through relationship with Him.

I see five characteristics of apostle Paul's ministry we should take a note:

A. FULL OF GOODNESS

Romans 15:14a Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness,

Saul of Tarsus didn't understand the grace of God at all because he was busy keeping the rituals and tradition of Judaism. From the moment he acknowledged Jesus as his Lord, it all changed. It was God's grace that called him and made him an apostle of Jesus Christ.

He wants others to extend the grace of God to one another. Too often we all slip into a pattern of focusing on other people's negatives and end up ignoring their positives. Isn't it truth, mom and dad? Don't we do that, husbands and wives? We tend to remember past bad things more clearly than good ones the other person did.

Here apostle Paul reminded them to encourage each other to do what they knew was right.

Unlike the believers in Corinth of Greece who constantly bickered and got on each other's case since they were carnal, the believers of Rome knew enough about the Gospel to live it out well.

B. FILLED WITH ALL KNOWLEDGE

Romans 15:14b filled with all knowledge

Our goal is not to gain information about the Scripture merely for information's sake. Rather, we grow in our knowledge of God's Word so that we can know Him better. And out of this deepened relationship, we will be more effective witnesses and servants for Him.

C. ABLE TO ADMONISH

Romans 15:14c able also to admonish one another.

I am sure that if you've been in Christianity for sometimes, you notice that there are people who think that they received a gift of criticism from the Lord. Here is news for them. There is no such spiritual gift of criticism. Nothing wrong with reproofing, correcting and instructing others in love as the Holy Spirit leads. Criticism often begins with gossip and being a busybody for nothing.

There was a widow named Alice in a small town church. She was the one who thought that the Holy Spirit gave her the gift of criticism personally and she made everybody's business her business and she was ever so self-righteous. It became so bad even the pastor kept himself away from her. There was no one who dared say anything to her because nobody wanted to be her next victim, until Dwayne became a brand new Christian in that church recently.

Dwayne was a widower and an electrician by trade. One day Alice was driving around town and spotted Dwayne's truck parked outside of a bar. Like a hawk going after a prey, she grabbed an opportunity to criticize about the loose living of Dwayne and being an alcoholic since his truck was parked in front of the bar in the morning. She didn't care that he was doing some electrical work for the owner of the bar. To her, he was a fresh piece of meat to chew and spit out.

Dwayne being a man of few words, didn't respond to her accusation on Sunday, simply left the church after the service was over. On that late evening Dwayne drove his truck to Alice's home and parked it in front of her home left it there all night long and walked back to his home. I am sure that it was Alice's turn to be on the receiving end of gossip.

The definition of the Greek word 'admonition' is "to set right" or "to have a corrective influence on someone." The Romans were apparently influencing the attitudes of their brothers and sisters through appropriate instruction, exhortation, warning and correction – all with the goal of helping them amend their lives for the better.

Admonishing others is sometimes necessary for their growth, but it is rarely easy or comfortable to do. Ever try to tell somebody the idea that they're wrong or that they need to change? One poorly chosen word can be like a spark on a powder keg. In this volatile context of conflict and confrontation, we must seek to "correct the mind, to put right what is wrong, and to improve the spiritual attitude." A tall order, to say the least!

How can we do it? The only way to effectively influence people toward growth and change is to engage in a loving relationship with them.

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Correction is so much easier to take when it comes from people who love us, people who want the best for us. And generally speaking, it's only in that context that we can effectively offer it.

D. OBEDIENT TO THE CALL OF GOD

Romans 15:15-16a Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, 16 that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God.

Like Paul, some of us have been called into vocation service to be missionaries, pastors and Bible teachers. Others He has called to be "tentmaker," to witness for Him as we make a living in non-religious professions.

Hear me well, please. No vocation is more sacred than another. A missionary is no more pleasing to God than a lawyer, a pastor no more spiritual than a plumber. What pleases God is our obedience to His call to serve in the body of Christ, whatever the role we play. Whatever the job you have, serve the Lord in that capacity wholeheartedly until the Lord gives you a different one.

It would have been an utter insult for Saul of Tarsus who was a legalistic Pharisee to hang around with the Gentiles and to give them the way of salvation. But because he was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul completely ignored his former concepts against the Gentiles. Some ancient Jews thought that the Gentiles were only good to be kindles for the fire in hell. Paul was obedient to the call of God for his life against his upbringing.

Some of you may say, "I don't know what God wants me to do?" For that question, I'd like to ask you a question. "When was the last time you stopped everything and gave your full attention to God to hear from Him without any distraction?" Don't expect that the Lord is going to display His text message for your assignment on the sky or show up in your TV screen or newspaper.

Here are the usual process the Lord uses. I used the word 'usual', because God doesn't limit Himself to a certain style or method. We cannot put Him in our limitation, because He is too big for that.

1) When the Lord wants you do something as a ministry, He will give you a desire and burden for that ministry.

Now, please don't limit the word "ministry" in your mind. Any area that you can be used to help, minister and encourage fellow believers in Christ and bring glory to God is a ministry. It doesn't have to be missions, teaching the Bible or leading worship. You can be a part of the "Movers and Shakers" ministry in our church that sets up and tears down the equipment before and after every Sunday service.

2) If you are not obedient to the call of God, the Holy Spirit will allow you to go through unrest in your heart until you make the right choice.

If you say, "Yes," to the Lord, He will take you to next level to confirm and equip you. But if you say, "No," you are the one who is missing out a great blessing to be used

by the Lord for His glory and you will find yourself not enjoying the fulfillment of your life.

3) When you are obedient to the Lord for His call, He will give you a confirmation or two to give you an assurance in your heart.

You don't need to force God to give you this confirmation. He will do it in His time, in His way. Wait upon the Lord.

One very important thing to keep in mind. Just because you are called in ministry, it doesn't mean that everything is going to happen in your way, with your approvals, in your timeline. It may be like "Hurry up and wait." While you wait upon the Lord, He prepares you to go up to next level.

From the time I realized that the Lord was calling me to be a pastor to the time I started a church in Sahuarita, there was a five year gap. Was it easy for a hyper-active person like me? Are you kidding me? Was it good for me? Yes, thousand times 'Yes.'

4) While you wait upon the Lord, He will equip you through His Spirit.

Isaiah 40:31 But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

God is not looking for someone with all the capabilities. If so, the person will take the glory. God is looking for someone who is available to be used by the Lord. It is about availability, not ability.

Zechariah 4:6b 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts.

5) God is looking for a person who wants to be a team player, not a prima donna.

The ministry God calls you to might already have a person or people. That means you become a team player, not a solo player. Team players are the ones that make things happen, not a prima donna. Acting as a prima donna not only nauseates the people around you because of your pride, but also it makes God angry. He will not share His glory with anyone else.

6) You may say, "The Lord may not call me to be a part of ministries for the church." If the truth be known, every Christian is called to serve one another without an exception.

The reason you think that you are not called in ministry is because you are selfish and you feel that working for the Lord is waste of your time. I promise you that you won't think that way when you see Jesus in heaven. You will say, "I wish I served Him on earth."

E. EFFECTIVENESS IN CHRIST

Romans 15:16b that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul looked on himself as a priest at the altar of the temple, offering up to God the Gentiles he had won to Christ. They were a "spiritual offering" to the glory of God. Even his preaching of the Gospel was a priestly duty. This insight into ministry certainly adds dignity and responsibility to our service. It was important that the priests offer to God only that which was the best.

Note the involvement of the Trinity in the ministry of the Word in v16. Paul was the minister of Jesus Christ. He preached “the Gospel of God” and he served in the power of the Holy Spirit of God who sanctified his ministry. What a privilege, and yet what a responsibility, to be the servant of the Triune God, winning the lost to Jesus Christ!

We must remember that soul-winning is a priestly ministry, a sacred obligation. And we must serve the Lord with dedication and devotion just as the priest in the temple.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) By yielding to the Spirit’s power, we can become spiritually and morally good others and ourselves.
- 2) By studying the Scriptures more intensely, we can raise our level of knowledge to be better witnesses and servants of God Most High.
- 3) By admonishing one another, we preserve the integrity of the body of Christ.
- 4) By obeying and following our callings, we can participate in God’s plan and become channels of His blessings to others.