



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major Missionary"

Romans 15:8-21

Certain quotes somehow make it into our common experience. Even if you've never heard of the *Blues Brothers*, you probably know that they claimed to be "on a mission from God."

Missions for God were on Paul's mind and heart as he got close to the end of the Book of Romans. Romans 15:8-12 discuss Jesus as missionary to the Jews and verses 9-21 discuss Paul as missionary to the Gentiles.

Romans 15:8 Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers,

The "circumcision" refers to the Jews. Jesus was sent first of all to minister to the Jews that through Israel all the world might hear the "truth of God," the Gospel as promised the "fathers," the Jewish patriarchs.

When Jesus sent out His disciples on their first evangelistic mission, He ordered them,

Matthew 10:5 "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans.

Matthew 10:6 "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Jesus didn't ignore Gentiles; He did minister to a few of them. He spoke to the Samaritan woman. His major mission, however, was to Israel.

Jesus came to His own people but they rejected Him. This did not in any way thwart God's plan of offering salvation to the Jews first, and then, through the Jews, to the Gentiles.

After His resurrection Jesus commanded His disciples to remain in Jerusalem and begin their ministry there. The period covered by Acts chapters one through seven is characterized by a ministry **only** to Jews or those who converted to Judaism. It was not until chapter eight that the Gospel went beyond the Jews to the Samaritans. In chapter ten it went out to the Gentiles. The rest of Acts largely involves the ministry of Paul taking the Gospel to whosoever will - Jew or Gentile.

The Old Testament often spoke of the blessing of the Gospel going out to the Gentiles. Paul quotes four such passages.

Romans 15:9 and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name."

Romans 15:10 And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"

Romans 15:11 And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!"

Romans 15:12 And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope."

Commentators notice a beautiful progression in these verses:

- Romans 15:9 quotes Psalm 18:49 and speaks of the Jews glorifying God among the Gentiles. This describes the ministry of Paul as he witnessed among the Gentiles.
- Romans 15:10 quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 and speaks of the Gentiles rejoicing with the Jews. This speaks of the decision of the early church to give the Gentiles equal standing with Jews.
- Romans 15:11 quotes Psalm 117:1 and speaks of Jews and Gentiles together praising God. This describes the age in which we live, in which Jew and Gentile distinctions are broken down so all who believe come to God by grace through faith in Jesus.
- Romans 15:12 quotes Isaiah 11:10 and speaks of Jesus reigning over Jews and Gentiles. This looks forward, beyond our own time, to the future one thousand year reign of Jesus on earth after His Second Coming.

God had, and has, a solid plan for missions.

The believing Jews at Rome were still having a hard time reconciling the salvation of multitudes of Gentiles with God's eternal promises to Israel. Paul assured them that everything was unfolding exactly according to God's plan for Jews and Gentiles alike. And he wanted to encourage them to get fully on board with God in reaching everyone, everywhere with the Gospel.

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The mention of “hope” in the quote from Isaiah brought a prayer to Paul’s heart. The God of the Bible is “the God of hope.” What is hope? It is the absolute expectation of all the good that God has promised. It can only come to the Christian; no one else can really have any hope in this certain sense.

Having hope, you can be filled “with all joy and peace in believing” in Jesus Christ. I said you ‘can’ because it’s a matter of faith. But if you walk in faith, having hope, knowing the God of hope, your hope will “abound” all the more “by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:14 Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

Since no one is good but God, “goodness” refers to the grace of God given to the Jewish brethren in Rome. Having themselves received God’s amazing grace they could certainly extend it towards others - even Gentiles. If grace is God’s unmerited favor then it must be available for everyone regardless ethnicity, otherwise it would be deserved.

“Filled with all knowledge” refers to spiritual knowledge, to the things of God. It can’t mean they knew everything about God, or that they had every doctrine down just right. No, it means they had a knowledge of the Gospel, of it’s power to save, and therefore should understand its whosoever will capacity.

Stop there for a moment. Regardless how hard it might be for an orthodox Jew to think that a pagan Gentile idolater could get saved without first or

subsequently converting to Judaism, if they considered that salvation was all of grace and that the message was universal in scope, that by itself should be enough to set aside any prejudices.

Paul trusted they would hear him, hear his teaching in this letter, and then “admonish one another.” They would adopt the things he was saying about the Gentiles and hold each other accountable.

Romans 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,
Romans 15:16 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.

Paul had been “more bold” in writing to them on “some points.” For example he had spent three entire chapters (nine, ten & eleven) talking about the past, present, and prophetic history of Israel.

“The offering of the Gentiles” is a curious phrase. The Jew would hear “offering” and think of the sacrificial system of the Law of Moses. The Gentiles were not making any such offerings. Instead, Paul indicated they themselves were the offerings, perhaps in the sense he had described earlier in Romans as living sacrifices wholly acceptable to God.

They were “sanctified” by the “Holy Spirit” in that He both indwelt them and was daily leading them toward maturity.

Romans 15:17 Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.
Romans 15:18 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;

Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was a definite calling from Jesus, giving him cause to give glory before God. Whatever he did among the Gentiles, in message or in ministering, Christ had done it through him.

It was Jesus Christ's will that Gentiles become "obedient." Saying that the Gentiles were made “obedient” means that although they were pagan idolaters, God did not leave them that way. No, they turned to God and

from idols. They weren't lawless; but they need not keep outwardly the Law of Moses. They were obedient to the law of love.

Romans 15:19 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 followed the preaching of the word of God. It often pleased God, and it often pleases Him today, to verify and validate His word by signs and wonders. With or without them, the Gospel "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the [Gentile]."

Paul said he had "fully preached" from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Illyricum corresponds to the former eastern European country of Yugoslavia.

Here is a clue to missions. What Paul had done was preached the Gospel, established churches, then moved on. His idea of "fully preaching" the Gospel was to establish churches whose members would multiply his work by continuing to reach their communities with the gospel after his departure.

The local church is God's means of world evangelism! Thus it follows that church planting ought to be a high priority.

Romans 15:20 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,
Romans 15:21 but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."

Paul's personal philosophy of ministry was to pioneer new work. He saw himself and others as builders laying a foundation of Jesus Christ upon which churches were being built up. To modernize what he was saying we might say that Jesus is the general contractor and that He appoints others as subs to do the building. Now if you're having a house built you don't need two electrical contractors or two cabinet makers. You only need the one the general contractor assigned.

I think it is an excellent and extremely biblical philosophy of ministry to not “build on another man’s foundation.” Notice Paul is not shy of calling it a “man’s foundation.” The foundation is the Lord but He has assigned men to build it.

There is plenty of work to be pioneered. Instead we sometimes want to establish some work where a work is already going on:

- We sometimes do this in communities where good churches are already ministering the Word.
- We sometimes do this within good churches by starting our own ministries.

There is a huge emphasis being put upon church planting in contemporary Christianity. That’s great - as long as you are *really* ‘planting’ and not *splitting or transplanting*.

In cities and towns that already have Bible teaching churches, you need to have a compelling reason to start another one. If you’re going to be very similar to another church, then just join with that other church. Make it stronger rather than taking away from it. Too much church planting is about personalities. It’s about a person or group wanting their own identity rather than being content to serve.

Look beyond what is already established to those who have not heard the Gospel!

Jesus was sent as a missionary to the Jews. Paul was sent as a missionary to the Gentiles. Missionaries are still sent today. Sometimes they are sent from one culture to another as a church sponsors one of its own members to go out. More often today missionaries are sent in a different and more effective sense as churches sponsor native missionaries to do full time work among their own nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.

We are not opposed to supporting missionaries in the traditional sense who travel from their advanced and advantaged culture into less advanced and disadvantaged cultures. But it is far more effective, both financially and

spiritually, to support native missionaries who God raises up within their own culture.

The average American or European missionary sent out to Asia requires anywhere from \$3,000 to \$5,000 dollars or more per person just to travel to and be maintained in a foreign culture. Once in the foreign country they often must live at a much higher standard of living than the people they are seeking to minister to. It is not unusual for them to require several thousand dollars a month in support while the people they preach to live on less than one hundred dollars a month.

K.P. Yohannan is founder and president of *Gospel for Asia*. He writes,

The task of the local church is not to serve as a missionary sending agency but as a cell in the... body of Christ. It is that... whole body of Christ which must accomplish the Great Commission in unified cooperation... As we work together... we will no longer feel the compulsion to send a member from our own congregation or denomination to the "uttermost parts [of the earth]". In fact, we will drop the notion that a true missionary has to be sent from "here" to "there." We are free to join with others and send missionaries from "there" to "there" if that is the more efficient way to use our resources. And... we will no longer insist that the missionary meet the peculiar qualifications and artificial standards of our local culture, favorite doctrines and denominational traditions. Instead, we should be able to accept and support any needy missionary from anywhere in the body of Christ... It allows us to help available native missionaries accomplish the task in an effective, efficient manner.

Each situation must be carefully evaluated. We do, however, prefer to support native missionaries and we do believe that this is the method that God the Holy Spirit is blessing in these Last Days.

If you're not called to go, you *are* called to send and support. If you send and support you share equally in the work of the person on the ground sharing the Gospel.

Mean time, **you** are the missionary to your own community of people - at work and at school and at home.