

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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OF THE GOSPEL —
THE PRACTICAL
CHURCH LIFE

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Living Stream Ministry

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There are eight sections of the book of Romans: introduction, condemnation, justification, sanctification, glorification, selection, transformation, and the last section, the conclusion (15:14—16:27). In this last section of Romans Paul shows us some experiential and practical matters. He presents a full unveiling of the ultimate consummation of the gospel. I use the word “unveiling” because so many of the precious things have been veiled. I want to point out some of the treasures that are hidden and concealed in the last section of Romans.

None of Paul’s other epistles has such a long conclusion as does the letter to the Romans. Why is the conclusion so long? I doubt that any of us would compose a letter in this way. However, Paul was wise and deep, knowing that after the section on transformation he still needed to present the ultimate consummation of God’s gospel—the practical church life. Furthermore, he

did not write about the church life in a doctrinal way, but in an exceedingly practical way. Hence, we find no doctrine in the conclusion; everything in this section is experiential and practical. Paul tells us of his zeal in preaching the gospel and of his desire to visit Spain. He tells how he was burdened to supply the material needs of the saints in Judea and that the Gentile believers wanted to help the Jewish saints in this matter.

In [Romans 16](#) the words “church” and “churches” are used five times. If we read this chapter carefully in the spirit, we will realize that Paul wrote it with a definite purpose. Every reference to the church in this chapter is experiential and practical.

The conclusion of Romans resembles the painting of a forest. If you look at this painting from afar, you will only see the forest itself; you will be unable to perceive the hidden things, the treasures hidden within the woods and under the leaves of the trees. Whenever I studied the book of Romans as a youth, I skipped over the conclusion, thinking that I had completed the doctrinal portions and did not need to give attention to the list of names in [chapter sixteen](#). Because I found these peculiar names difficult to pronounce, I decided to study this book only through

15:13 and the last three verses of chapter sixteen which are a melody of praise to God and which should not be neglected. Recently, however, the Holy Spirit brought me into the forest and showed me some of the treasures concealed beneath the shadows cast by the trees. Now I believe that the conclusion is the most precious and valuable section of the entire book of Romans. The practical church life is hidden under the shadows of the trees. We may say that the greetings to the individual saints are the trees and that under the trees are the churches as the treasures—the church at Cenchrea, the churches of the nations, the church in the home of Prisca and Aquila, the churches of Christ, and the church which received hospitality from Gaius. Now I want to consider these hidden treasures in some detail.

THE OFFERING OF THE NATIONS

We need to read 15:16. “That I should be a minister of Christ Jesus to the nations, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that the offering of the nations might be acceptable, having been sanctified in the Holy Spirit.” Paul was a minister of Christ, a public servant serving people with Christ, ministering Christ into the Gentile believers. He was like a waiter serving people at the

dining table with delicious food. Paul was a waiter at the universal dining table, serving people with Christ. All the people at this dining table were filled with Christ, and Christ became the transforming element within their being. Thus, the Gentiles were transformed with the essence of the wonderful, all-inclusive Christ, who is the life-giving Spirit. Moreover, this verse reveals that Paul was a priest, for he was “ministering as a priest the gospel of God.” As a priest he offered to God the believing Gentiles as a sweet sacrifice for His satisfaction. The very Gentiles whom he served with Christ he presented to God as an offering.

The Preaching of the Gospel

The offering of the nations was made possible through the wide-spread preaching of the gospel (15:18-23). In 15:19 Paul says that “from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” During Paul’s time, Illyricum was a remote region on the northeastern corner of Europe. Paul preached the gospel from Jerusalem, a cultured city, to a remote, uncultured region. Furthermore, he desired to travel all the way to Spain (v. 24).

Our preaching of the gospel must be uplifted.

Our gospel should not be a kind of heaven-going gospel; it must be a gospel which ministers Christ to people. We need to minister Christ to people that they may be sanctified and transformed with the very essence of Christ and thereby become an offering to God. Whenever and wherever the church preaches the gospel, we must do it with the conviction that we are ministering Christ to people, that we are serving Christ as food for hungry sinners. We must minister Christ to them in order that Christ might become within them the sanctifying element to change their very being.

A Sweet Offering to God

In [15:16](#) Paul says that “the offering of the nations might be acceptable, having been sanctified in the Holy Spirit.” To be sanctified means to be separated, to be made holy with transformation in life. Paul considers the Gentile believers as a sweet offering to God. Once they were unclean and defiled people, but now they are sanctified and have become an offering pleasing to God. They have been transformed and conformed to the image of God and thus are fully acceptable to Him. This was the result of Paul’s ministering Christ into the Gentiles. When Christ

was wrought into them, becoming their very element, the Gentiles became a corporate offering to God, an offering that had been saturated with Christ and permeated with His divine essence. Hence, they were presented to God for His satisfaction.

THE COMMUNICATION IN LOVE

Out of the ministering of Christ to the nations and the offering of them as a sacrifice to God, developed the fellowship of love, the communication in love between the Gentiles and Jewish saints (15:25-28, 30, 32). The Gentile saints communicated with the Jewish saints by the means of giving practical, material things. Formerly, in the eyes of the Jews, the Gentiles were swine; now they have become saints, a fragrant offering to God. Thus, the Gentile believers had it in their heart to care for the material needs of their Jewish brothers, and they offered their own possessions as the expression of their desire to take care of the needs of the saints in Judea. When the Apostle Paul came to the Gentiles, he came with Christ and ministered Christ into them. When he returned from them to Judea, he returned with material possessions for the needy saints. Paul came with

Christ and returned with material possessions of the saints' love. This was the result of Paul's ministry.

The spirituality of many Christians today is too impractical. They say, "I am for Christ and I will bring Christ everywhere, but I don't care for money or for material possessions." If you say this, it may mean that your spirituality is impractical. Consider the example of the Apostle Paul. He went to Achaia and Macedonia, ministering Christ to the people. What was the outcome of this? The outcome was that the Gentile believers contributed their own material possessions to care for their ex-enemies, their Jewish brothers in Christ. After the Gentiles had been converted, regenerated, sanctified, and transformed, their old heart had been removed, and a new heart had been implanted, a heart of concern for their Jewish brothers. They expressed this concern in a practical way by giving material things. They did not say, "Paul, we stand with you, we go with you, and our prayer follows you. Send our greetings to the dear saints in the Holy Land." Paul exemplified the practical church life by going with Christ and returning with material possessions. This is the genuine communication in love and practical expression of concern.

The Blessing of Christ

We have seen Paul's relationship with two parties: with the Gentiles, to whom he ministered Christ, and with the Jews, to whom he brought material possessions. However, [15:29](#) unfolds Paul's relationship with a third party: the believers in Rome whom he hoped to see on his way to Spain. In this verse we see how Paul expected to come to the saints in Rome. "And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ." Paul did not say this in any other epistle. Paul went to the Gentiles with Christ, returned to the Jewish brothers with material possessions, and expected to visit Rome in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. This is the church life. The church life is being filled up with Christ, filled with love in the communication of material possessions, and filled with the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I expect to see in all the churches that Christ is ministered to people everywhere, that these people will respond with sincerity and love in their material possessions, and that there will also be the mutual participation in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. We should not be those who share doctrinal truths wherever we go. Wherever we

go we must go with the fullness of the blessing of Christ. However, before we can go with the blessing of Christ, we must first experience it ourselves. Paul could go anywhere to share the fullness of the blessing of Christ because he had the full experience of it. As we travel among the churches, let us not take with us doctrines and gifts, but the fullness of the blessing of Christ. It is not only a matter of giving material things, although such communication is a true expression of the reality of Christ. If we have the reality of Christ, we shall pour ourselves out as an expression of our love toward the needy saints. Paul was very wise, giving us a picture of the proper practice of the church life in experience, not in doctrine. With Paul we see the experience of all the riches of Christ. When he came to people with the fullness of the blessing of Christ, it meant that he came to them ministering all the riches of Christ.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF CONCERN

I believe that the Apostle Paul took the lead in the fellowship of concern among the saints and between the churches (16:1-19, 21-23). Paul initiated the fellowship of concern. He was concerned for the saints, the Lord's servants, and for

the churches. He was a brother who was altogether immersed in the fellowship of concern. All of the particular greetings recorded in [Romans 16](#) are an evidence of his far-reaching concern. I like this chapter because it reveals that included in this fellowship of concern are the churches. This fellowship of concern was among the saints within the churches and between the churches.

The church and the churches are mentioned five times in [Romans 16](#). In [16:1](#) Paul says, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deaconess of the church which is at Cenchrea.” Phoebe was a deaconess, that is, a serving one. Paul held her in such high esteem that in the following verse he said that “she has been a patroness of many and of myself as well.” The term “patroness” in Greek is a word of dignity, denoting one who helps, sustains, and supplies. A patroness is one who stands beside you, serves you, nourishes and cherishes you, and cares for all your needs. Paul’s use of this word with reference to Phoebe discloses how much she was appreciated and regarded. Phoebe was a sister who served others at any price and at any cost. If we mean business with the Lord in the church life, we also need to serve the church and care

for it regardless of the cost. If we lack the heart to care for the church, we are unworthy of the practice of the church life. The first requirement for the practice of the church life is that we serve the church. Sister Phoebe was a patroness of the church. Likewise we all must be the serving ones in the church life.

Secondly, Paul indicates that we need to risk our necks for the church. Speaking of Prisca and Aquila, Paul says in [16:4](#) that they “risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the nations.” We need to risk our lives for the church life. Prisca and Aquila did not count their own lives as dear to them; they were willing to care for the churches at the cost of their own lives. Therefore, all the churches of the nations, of the Gentile world, were grateful to them. Do not think that Paul spoke about Prisca and Aquila in a light way. He wrote with a definite purpose, indicating that if we truly love the Lord’s church, we need to risk our lives for it. We must be willing to pay this cost not only for one church, but also for the churches. Some dear saints only care for the church in their locality. This is absolutely wrong. Prisca and Aquila were for all the churches. Although it is right to be located by the Lord in

a specific place, our heart should be wide and broad enough to embrace all the churches.

The third mention of the church is in [16:5](#), where Paul says, “greet the church in their house,” referring to the house of Prisca and Aquila. On the one hand this couple was for all the churches; on the other hand they were for their local church in particular. When they were living in Ephesus ([Acts 18:18-19](#)), the church in Ephesus was in their house ([1 Cor. 16:19](#)). When they were in Rome, the church in Rome met in their house.

The “church in their house” in [verse 5](#) was the church in Rome. To have the church in your home is a very heavy burden. If you try it, you will discover how heavy a burden it is. However, Prisca and Aquila were absolute for the church life; they did not care for the heavy burden.

In [16:16](#) Paul says, “The churches of Christ greet you.” Suddenly Paul mentions “the churches of Christ.” Wherever the churches are located, in your city or in my town, they must be the churches of Christ. The church in every locality must be the church of Christ. Do not say that the church is the church of Brother So-and-So. Such a saying is mistaken. We must all learn to say “the churches of Christ.”

The last mention of the church in Romans

regards hospitality. “Gaius, my host, and of the whole church, greets you” (v. 23). Without hospitality there is something lacking in the practical church life. If there is no hospitality in a certain church, that church must be poor. However, the more hospitality you have, the richer your church life will be. Gaius was not only the host of one apostle, but the host of the entire church. I do not believe that he rendered hospitality to the whole church all at once, but that probably the saints who traveled to his city and perhaps remained there for a while, received hospitality from him. His home was open and available to all the saints. The genuine church life depends upon this kind of hospitality. When a home is open to hospitality, it will be filled with the blessing of Christ. We praise the Lord that the more hospitality we render, the greater will be our experience of the church life. This is practical.

In his greetings recorded in [Romans 16](#), Paul unveiled the crucial indicators of the proper church life both in a particular local church and among the churches. His greetings also underscore the qualities of many of the dear saints. Thus, in [Romans 16](#) we see the churches in localities and the details of the genuine church life

expressed in the attributes and virtues of so many saints. This is a complete portrait of the ancient church life. Once again I say that in Romans we do not find the doctrine of the church; we behold the practicality of the church life. Hence, the ultimate consummation of the gospel is the church life.

What a great contrast there is between [Romans 1](#) and [16](#). In [chapter one](#) we see sinners, people that are evil, unclean, and condemned; in [chapter sixteen](#) we see the churches that are holy and glorious. There is no comparison. How did vile sinners become glorious churches? Through the lengthy process revealed from [chapter one through chapter sixteen](#), the process of redemption, justification, sanctification, glorification, selection, and transformation. As a result of a long process sinners have become glorious churches, churches that are holy and yet so practical.

Crushing Satan

After the greeting which shows the fellowship of concern among the saints and between the churches, the Apostle declared that the God of peace would crush Satan, and would crush him soon under the feet of the saints who are

in the church life (16:20). This indicates that the crushing of Satan by God is related to the church life. If we are not in the church and do not practice the church life, it will be difficult for us to have Satan crushed under our feet by God. The church life is the strongest means by which God overcomes Satan. Whenever we are separated from the church, we become a prey for Satan, for it is difficult for us to fight Satan individually. But, praise the Lord, that when we are in the church and are one with the Body, Satan is under our feet, and we enjoy God as the God of peace in the church life. We experience and participate in the peace of God by our victory over the troublemaker, Satan. As long as Satan, the troublemaker, is not under our feet, it will be difficult for us to have peace. When he is crushed under our feet in the church life, we have the peace of God as a token of our victory over him. So, both the crushing of Satan and the peace of God are experienced in the church life.

Grace Dispensed to the Saints

Following his declaration that God will crush Satan under the feet of the church people, the Apostle gives his blessing to them, saying that the grace of the Lord Jesus would be with them

(16:20). This indicates that it is in the church life that the grace of the Lord Jesus is dispensed to all the saints. A great many believers miss this grace because they are separate from the church life. We all can testify that we have a rich enjoyment of the Lord's grace when we are living in the church and practicing the Body life with all the saints. The church is the place where the Lord dispenses His grace and where we may partake of it. The church is not only the place where we have Satan crushed under our feet and experience the God of peace, but also the place where we enjoy the rich grace of the Lord.

THE CONCLUDING PRAISE

Let us read 16:25-27. "Now to Him Who is of power to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in times of the ages, but now has been manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the command of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations unto obedience of faith, to the only wise God through Jesus Christ be the glory forever and ever! Amen." This concluding praise is like a melody. Paul refers to God as the One who

has “power to establish you.” In [Romans 16](#) our need is no longer salvation or sanctification; our need is to be established. Everything has been accomplished, and we only need to be established. We are not established according to doctrines or dispensational truths, but according to the gospel, the preaching of Christ, and the revelation of the mystery. Oh, how the saints today need to be rescued from the divisive doctrines and dividing practices and to be established by the pure and full gospel of God, by the preaching and ministering of the living and all-inclusive Christ, and by the revelation of God’s mystery! Only the pure gospel, the living Christ, and God’s revealed mystery can establish us and keep us in unity for the church life.

This mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages, and has not been revealed, is mainly of two aspects: one is the mystery of God ([Col. 2:2](#)), which is Christ, who is in the believers ([Col. 1:26-27](#)) as their life and their everything that they may become the members of His Body; another is the mystery of Christ ([Eph. 3:4-6](#)), which is the church as His Body to express His fullness ([Eph. 1:22-23](#)). Therefore, Christ and the church are the great mystery ([Eph. 5:32](#)). Romans firstly tells us how the believers

have been baptized into Christ (6:3), how Christ has been wrought into the believers (8:10), and how the believers have put on Christ (13:14). Then it reveals how all these believers are built together into one Body (12:4-5) to express Christ. Thus the churches have come into existence in many cities in a local and practical way, with all the saints loving one another and fellowshiping with one another among all the churches to express the Body of Christ for the fulfillment of God's mystery. This is the ultimate consummation of the full gospel of God. It is through this that Satan is crushed under the feet of the saints (16:20), that the grace of Christ is dispensed to all the saints (16:20), and that the glory is and will be to God unto the ages of the ages (16:27). The eternal God has made known this mystery to all the nations unto obedience of faith.

In Romans 15 and 16 God is called the God of endurance and encouragement (15:5), the God of hope (15:13), the God of peace (16:20), the eternal God (16:26), and the only wise God (16:27). Our God is a rich God in many aspects—in endurance, encouragement, hope, peace, wisdom, and in being eternal—and the gospel in Romans is the gospel of such a rich God. The

gospel of such a rich God consummates in the practical church life. Hallelujah!

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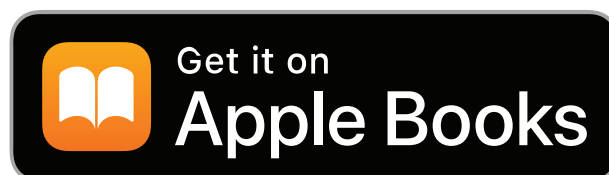
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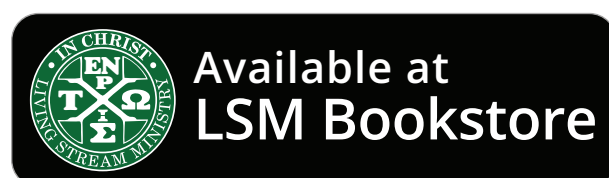
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