

## An Offering Acceptable to God

Romans 15:14-33

Key Verse: 16

*“to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”*

Early in the book of Genesis, we read the story of Cain and Abel, who were two brothers that brought their offerings to God. When they did so, God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's, why? When I first read it, I thought that it was not fair. They both made offerings and gave to God why accept one and not the other? However when we look closer, God rejected Cain's offering because his motive was not right. And the whole point in offering, is to bring an something that is acceptable to God, not simply something we can afford, or don't want or something that makes us happy. Rather, our offerings must be acceptable to God. And that's what our passage is about today. According to our key verse, Paul's life was about proclaiming the gospel so that we might become acceptable to God.

As Paul thought about his Roman brothers and sisters in Christ, he longed to see them, to visit them and to be with them. It wasn't that he wanted to be their leader or establish them under his control so that they would be part of his church. Rather it was because he genuinely loved them. He fully believed that they were able to instruct one another. Let's take a look at verse 14. “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” When we look at chapter 16 we see that the people Paul was writing this letter to weren't new Christians. There was Priscilla and Aquila who had been Paul's close companions during God's pioneering work in Corinth and Ephesus. There was also Andronicus and Junias who were Christians longer than Paul had been. Paul knew that the people in the church of Rome were full of goodness, meaning that they had been so transformed by the gospel that they shone the goodness of Jesus even though the evil of the world was all around them. They were complete in knowledge, that is, they knew the full gospel message in all its aspects and they were fully competent to instruct one another. In a word, they were spiritually mature people who could really teach the Bible. Last week we studied Matthew 27-28 for our Easter retreat. And at the end of 28 Jesus gave his disciples what we call “The World Mission Command,” or “The Great Commission” and that is to go into the world and make disciples of all nations teaching them to obey God's word. And what we see in this chapter is Jesus' great commission actually being lived out and fulfilled. People were repenting of their sins and accepting Jesus as their savior and then going out and teaching others who were repenting and believing and going out as well. They were a reproductive church. One sign of a healthy church is that it is reproducing and making disciples of Jesus. Paul had planted the word of God and trusted that God would complete the good work that he started.

Even though Paul was convinced that the Roman Christians were filled with the gospel and competent to instruct one another, that didn't stop him from reminding them about it. Take a look at verse 15. “Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me” Not only did Paul remind them of the gospel, he did it quite boldly. For example he proclaimed, “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,”<sup>23</sup> for

all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (3:22-23) or “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,”<sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (8:38-39). Paul took the grace the God gave him and used it boldly. I believe that some of us here must do the same thing. We’ve accepted God’s grace, now is the time that we must use it boldly to remind each other of the gospel. The gospel message is surprisingly simple, yet it’s deeper than the ocean. The more we study it, the deeper our understanding of it goes.

Take for example the famous verse John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” It’s simple, we’ve heard this verse a million times. Maybe the first time you’ve thought about it, you find that by believing the gospel message you have eternal life. Then later you read it again and the gospel message that speaks to you this time is about God’s amazing love. And then another time when you read this verse maybe the gospel message that speaks to you now is how God gave his only Son for you and when you consider the pain that God bore to give his only son, for those who rejected Him you are moved to tears. The gospel message is simple but powerful. It’s so deep that one verse can move us in many different ways. Therefore we must study the Bible with an open heart, especially the gospel message, so that God’s word may speak to us personally. As our society becomes more hard hearted and hostile toward God, we need to be reminded of the old, old story of the gospel until our hearts are moved. Otherwise we may become discouraged and downtrodden. We NEED to be encouraged and lifted up by the power of the word of God.

At the end of verse 15 notice the words “because of the grace given me by God.” It sounds like a simple statement but again it’s so deep. Paul did not choose apostleship as his career path. Rather it was God that chose him and called him and trained him for his mission. Paul never got over the amazing grace that God would call a Christian-killer to lead the Gentile mission. The Risen Christ came to Paul and revealed his glory to him. Jesus forgave his sins and gave him the peace of God. Now he had a new life and a holy mission to carry Jesus’ name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel (Ac 9:15). Paul always remembered the grace of Jesus who saved him and gave him a holy mission. Paul suffered so much as he carried out this mission. He was hated by his own people and often abused verbally and physically and yet, he always remembered the grace of Jesus. This grace had two elements: the grace of salvation and the grace of mission. This grace was for the glory of Christ Jesus. We who carry God’s mission must remember His grace and thank God even in the midst of suffering. God loves his people and his grace is sufficient for us. (2 Cor 12:9)

Take a look at verse 16, “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” God had called Paul to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. The definition of a minister is “a person acting as the agent or instrument of another” of “a person appointed by or under the authority of a sovereign head,” such as the government, like the minister of defense, minister of finance or the Prime Minister. Just as the minister of defense takes care of all the military needs of a country, Paul was appointed by, and under the authority of God, responsible for bringing Jesus to the Gentiles. So what did that

entail? Paul was given the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel. Paul uses an interesting phrase, priestly duty. Using this phrase gives us an image of the Levites who were the priests appointed by God during the time of Moses. They were the ones who served at the Temple and carried out the offering duties. The priests duties hinted at proclaiming the gospel, for they were to proclaim God's name to the people and offer sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sins, which is why Jesus came into the world in the first place.

Here Paul tells us that the priestly duty is to proclaim the gospel of God. Gospel means "good news." It is the good news of God's love and salvation for sinners through his Son Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He will come again in great power and glory to judge the living and the dead. Whoever believes in him will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. This salvation begins the moment we believe (Jn 5:24). Jesus liberates us from Satan's domain and gives us the kingdom of God. Proclaiming is not the same as chatting about. Proclamation is an announcement with absolute faith in the message. Like a herald proclaiming the coming of a king or the officer in a courtroom saying, "All rise for the Judge is entering the courtroom." So proclaiming the gospel means to announce that Jesus Christ is the Way and the Truth and the Life—that he is the only way to God, and to believe it with all your heart. (Jn 14:6)

What is Paul's goal in proclaiming the gospel? We find the answer in verse 16, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God. I can imagine the fear that some people might have if they heard Paul say, "I've come so that you might be an acceptable offering to God," with an implication that they would eventually be sacrificed. Human sacrifice was part of the pagan rituals but not in Christianity, Jesus paid the price for our sins once and for all. However we are called to offer our bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God – this is our spiritual act of worship. As we saw with Cain and Abel offering is an important matter to God. Do you remember when we studied 1 Samuel, Saul was waiting for Samuel to come and prepare the offerings, but he became impatient and decide to do it himself. And just as she finished Samuel arrived asking "What have you done?" Saul replied, "I couldn't wait any longer, so I did it myself." (1 Sam 13) "You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. <sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command." (1 Sam 13:13-14) God rejected Saul's offering because it was not acceptable to him.

What does it mean to be an offering acceptable to God? To understand this we can look to Jesus for he is the Lamb of God that was sacrificed for the sin of the world. (Jn 1:29) Jesus was an offering acceptable to God. He was humble, unblemished, sinless, and obedient to God his Father. Christ gave himself as an offering to God for us. Still the question remains how can we be an offering acceptable to God. Here are some examples: "you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 2:5) it is only through Jesus that we can offer anything acceptable to God. We must do our best before the Lord with a sincere and pure heart. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and

who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:15) “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. <sup>16</sup> And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” (Heb 13:15-16)

I believe that Paul gave us a good example as he followed Jesus. Because he always pointed back to God. For example at the end of verse 16 he shows that he didn't take credit for God's work. He never worked alone but that the Holy Spirit did the work. In comparison to the Almighty Creator God, Paul's work was small. In fact that's all we can ever offer, because we don't have much to offer to God. However God accepted Paul's small offering and blessed it. This is all we can really do, is offer whatever small offerings we have to God and he can do the rest. When I thought about our Easter retreat this year, I felt that we really didn't have much to offer but to my amazement God accepted our small offerings and blessed them much more than we imagined. God works through the power of the Holy Spirit when we offer what little we have with a sincere and honest heart.

Let's look at verse 18. “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” From these verses we see that Paul would only speak of what Christ had accomplished through him. Does this mean that he was boring talking about only one thing all the time? Or that he was so full of himself saying, “Look what God has done through me....” I don't believe so. I believe that Paul was a very interesting person and he loved people so he connected with them based upon their interests but at the same time he never failed to mention the gospel. Also we can see Paul's method in his offering to God, at the end of verse 18 when he says “what I have said and done.” Paul's method was to preach the word of God followed by his actions in living out the gospel. He didn't do one without the other and it was always in that order. First proclaim the gospel and then live it out. And in verse 19 we see God's confirmation. It says, “by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.” God confirmed Paul's proclamation with many signs and wonders. This gave authority to his message. Paul ambition was to preach the gospel where Christ was not known (v20) for he had already proclaimed it all around Jerusalem, Illyricum (v19) and we see that he wanted to go to Rome and then to Spain, which he thought was the end of the earth. Paul was always desiring to bring the gospel to new people.

Take a look at verses 30-31. “I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. <sup>31</sup> Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there.” We see Paul's personal prayer for his safety so that he would be able to continue preaching the gospel. Paul knew what was waiting for him in Jerusalem. They wanted to arrest him there, because of his preaching. But since the Gentiles in Macedonia and Achaia had made an offering for the poor, Paul had to take it to Jerusalem. (v25) Many people advised Paul not to go to Jerusalem because the religious leaders wanted to arrest him and possibly kill him. Still Paul was willing to go and give his life if that was what God required of him. Paul was a good example of being a living sacrifice acceptable to God because he was willing to give it all. Offerings require sacrifice. So when we offer to God it may require us to give us something we want to keep for ourselves, such as our time, our effort, our money

whatever it may be. John said last week he gave up his season ticket to Bears football games because they were on Sunday mornings and that conflicted with church. This should make us think and look at ourselves before God. May God bless you to grow to become an offering that is acceptable to God.

Righteousness by Faith