

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Paul's Unstoppable Desire to Follow God's Will in Sharing the Gospel
Romans 15:17
September 2, 2018

There are two points to today's message:

- Paul passed on the credit to Christ
- Paul desired to remove ignorance

1-PAUL PASSED ON THE CREDIT TO CHRIST

SCRIPTURE Romans 15:17-18

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 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— .

EXPLANATION

If you've studied very much of the Bible at all, you know that wherever the Apostle Paul went he made sure that everyone knew why he was there and who was empowering him. There was not an occasion where Paul was standing around, and people wondered why he was there: Who is this guy from this foreign land? What is he here for? What is his message?

He told everybody boldly. Wherever he went, he constantly gave all credit to Christ Jesus, which as I understand it, means risen Lord. Before the resurrection, the scripture refers to Jesus as Jesus Christ. Now, on the other side of the Resurrection, Paul calls him Christ Jesus—risen Lord—because he had already done the saving work on the cross and risen from that grave. Paul made sure everyone knew that it was Christ Jesus who fueled him, who gave him his passion to share the gospel, and who provided for him. Paul was totally sold out to Jesus, and he kept absolutely nothing for himself.

As we know from studying the life of Paul, he said he'd learned to be content whether he had plenty or whether he had just a little. I want you to consider his life before he was converted.

There was this man Paul who was named Saul, and he provided some biography about himself and his past in Acts 22:3. He says, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today."

Paul is addressing a group of Jews there in Acts chapter 22. Everything about Paul's life before he was converted vetted him for success. He was born a Jew. He was trained under Gamaliel, who was a well-respected Pharisee, and he was considered, in our terms, basically a doctor. He was a doctor because of his authority on the law of Moses. People wanted to be schooled by Gamaliel, and Paul was an educated man. He was a tent maker by trade, and he was so zealous for God under the Jewish tradition that he thought he was doing God a favor by eradicating the world of these new, odd people called Christians, followers of Christ. No doubt, Paul would have been set for life financially had he never been converted on the Damascus Road. If he had never come to Christ, he could have easily expanded his career and made more money, and then wandered into a cushy retirement that had every single thing he needed. But God had other plans for this man named Saul. When Saul saw this great light on his way to persecute Christians, and he heard a voice that said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When he heard that voice, when he saw that light, he was never the same again. When Paul met Jesus, everything changed. His career changed. His future changed. Everything about his life changed.

Paul modeled what he preached. Whatever he expected believers to do, he did. He's the model for all of us who are in leadership. He went where God led him to go. He reached that point in life where every Christian should be as he said in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." Then, he went on to say, "If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." (Philippians 1:22-24)

Paul got to that point in his life where all of us should be. If I live, great. If I die, great! I will serve the Lord if I am in the body or if I'm out of the body. I'm totally his. I am completely at his disposal. Whatever he wants of me, I will do. Paul completely emptied himself 100% to the call that he received that day on the Damascus Road.

APPLICATION

In your life, are you giving the Lord credit like Paul did, or do you even have anything to give the Lord the credit for? If there's no indication of this Christ Jesus living in you, then you have no reason to pass along the credit to him. The reason that Paul gave the Lord the credit for everything was because he actually obeyed the Lord to take the gospel around the world. Had Paul disobeyed, it would have been a slap in the Lord's face for him to give the Lord credit. In God's grace and mercy, he uses us even when we're disobedient to him, but Paul when he said, "I boast, but I only boast in the Lord, what he meant by that was that he was proud of the accomplishments that the Lord had accomplished through him, not what he had done under his own power.

Paul's life changed after he met Christ. He was truly converted from one way of living and thinking to another way of living and thinking. He did a complete about-face. His life was moving in the direction of eradicating Christians from the face of the earth and stifling this message called the gospel of Jesus. Then he did a complete about-face. He went in another direction, that of helping Christians, winning new converts, and sharing the gospel all over the known world.

ILLUSTRATION

One day I had lunch with a group of preachers, and we were talking about how our lives might have turned out had we not become followers of Jesus and gone into the ministry. It was a rather light-hearted conversation, and we were saying, "Well, if I weren't in the ministry, and I weren't a Christian, I'd probably be this you know," and we named some career. Finally, one person said, "This is the dumbest conversation ever," and we all agreed how futile it was to sit there and wonder what our lives would have been like without Christ. I can't even imagine.

The Apostle Paul was happier being a sold-out believer and follower of Jesus with no real place to call his home than he would have been as a wealthy, retired Jew who followed the law of Moses. Are you following God's will for your life? Do you ever consider what God's will is for your life? Do you even know what it is?

I wonder how many here who are married consider God's will in your marriage. Maybe God wants the two of you as a couple to set some spiritual goals together. I would say most couples never even talk about it. We're so individualistic in this country, but when you're married you've got a partner here to share in all this with you. Hopefully, you're sharing, and you're talking about what God's will is for you together as a couple. Those of you who have children still at home, have you ever considered what God's will is for you as a family? Is there a mission God wants you to accomplish as a family? Is there a difference he wants you to make in other's lives? Most people probably don't even talk about it.

Being a pastor of senior adults, many of whom are shut-in, I've learned this. Following God's will and obeying his direction really have no limits. Recently, I had a deep spiritual conversation with a person in our church who's almost paralyzed, and she's confined to a bed, but she knows that God has a will for her in that bed. She knows that it's up to her to share God's love with her caregivers and with the residents that come to visit her. While I was visiting her, a woman came in sitting in a wheelchair, and she was singing some song. This woman that was in bed started singing the song with her, and when the song finished, the lady backed out her wheelchair and went on down the hall. This woman knows that it's up to her to be obedient to God even in her paralyzed state.

What's your excuse? Paul had this desire to pass the credit onto Christ, and Paul tells us that his desire was to remove ignorance.

2-PAUL DESIRED TO REMOVE IGNORANCE

SCRIPTURE Romans 15:19-22

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ Rather,

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as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."^[a]²² *This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.*

EXPLANATION

If you know basic geography, I'll tell you where Illyricum is. It's modern-day Albania, Croatia, and Slovenia. If you keep up with the Voice of the Martyrs, in Albania, the gospel has been hindered, and Christians have been persecuted for years. There may be a little bit of freedom right now, but today in that country there are more Muslims than any other religion. Paul was the first person to take the gospel to that area.

In verse 21, he actually quotes Isaiah 52:15, "So he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand."

The English word "sprinkle" is translated from a Hebrew word which always refers to blood in the Old Testament. For instance, it's the same word used with the blood offerings, the animal sacrifices, from the Old Testament. Paul, being a well-schooled Jew, would have known the scripture even before he was converted to Christ. This was clearly an Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah and his upcoming crucifixion, but Paul's glory was not in what he did for God but for what God did through him. Being raised to know the scriptures, the young Saul had absolutely no idea that God would use him someday to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 52, that the gospel would go to people who had never heard it.

Paul's desire to reach out to those who had never heard came with an explanation—that he would not be building on someone else's foundation. He knew that the Jews had the background and would accept Jesus as the Messiah, and he also knew that the original disciples were preaching the gospel. He knew that there were others like Apollos who was sharing. So, while Paul argued with these Jews sometimes, and while he tried to educate them and convert them to Christ, I believe that he became frustrated with their theological baggage. God called him to be the missionary to the Gentiles, be the missionary to those who didn't have the theological baggage, be the missionary to those who wouldn't argue with him about it.

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While it was God's call for him to reach out to the Gentiles, this came with a huge advantage. The starting point was the saving work of Jesus, not the law of Moses. As Paul pointed out to the Jews, they missed it completely because the law of Moses was to pave the way for the Messiah. It was there to set up a whole new experience in the minds of believers as they tried to follow the law of Moses, and as many of them failed and needed forgiveness of their sins. They were caught up in the animal, sacrificial system that God prescribed in the Old Testament. Isaiah 52 was a prophecy of the coming Messiah, but they missed it. Paul said, “You've missed it; you're so caught up following the law that you missed the spirit of the law.”

When they missed the spirit of the law, they just missed it completely. Paul, with his desire to spread the gospel, went to people who had never heard it before. So, the starting point was not arguing about Jewish tradition or Jewish law or the law of Moses. The starting point was what Paul knew about sin. Everyone is a sinner. Everyone needed to be forgiven back then and today as well. When Paul started with that point, people knew exactly what he was talking about, and then, he presented Jesus to them.

Most people starting a new church today will tell you that they are looking for those who have no church background whatsoever. They want to find the lost who are not open to the gospel so they can grow a fellowship of believers not built on someone else's foundation. A lot of times, that foundation is tradition, not so much scripture. A group of people wanting to start a new church really want to start out and create their own traditions. They don't want to attract people from other churches who will just say, “Well, we always did it like this back at our other church.” They want a fresh, clean start. Last week, I talked with a man from another Baptist group. He wasn't Southern Baptist. He told me that his denominational thrust was sending missionaries to Texas. Of course, Texas has a church on every corner, and missionaries really need to go to people who've not heard. Perhaps this group is sending missionaries to people who have not heard in Texas. I don't know we know. We know there are people without Christ everywhere. We know there are people without Christ within one block of this church, and maybe he didn't know the whole story of his denomination, but my question is this. Why don't we focus on reaching the people who've never heard and let the churches in Texas focus on reaching the

people who've never heard in Texas? There are people all over the earth who have not heard the gospel.

There's one island in the Indian Ocean called North Sentinel Island. It's full of natives who, to our knowledge, to the knowledge of anyone, have never had successful outside contact with anyone. They've killed every person who's tried to get to that island. So, outside attempts to contact these people have ceased because they're just so violent, but North Sentinel Island has hundreds of people that live on it who've had no outside contact to the world. To everyone's knowledge, the gospel has not reached them yet. What's going to happen to them? Will they ever hear? Will anyone ever go? Who knows?

Where is your mission field? The Apostle Paul, in his day, had he known about North Sentinel Island probably would have gone, and he would have trusted God, and God probably would have protected him. He would have shared the gospel, but he didn't know about it back then. Maybe people weren't even on that island back then, but he went where God told him to go. God might not be calling you to North Sentinel Island, but he wants you to share his message with others.

So, be the missionary in your own setting, at home, at work, at the rest home, even in a hospice. Be the missionary in your own setting. We can do it, can't we? We've got the message. We can be like Paul, and we can pass on the credit to the Lord. We can seek to remove ignorance of the gospel. Paul modeled it for us. He showed us that it can be done. You can do it. I can do it.

Last week, there was a message preached in Nashville by a pastor many of you know. A statement in his message was this, "We are satisfied customers but poor salesmen." Think about that. I think that's very true among many Christians. We are satisfied customers, but we're poor salesmen. Let's be more like Paul. Let's abandon all to follow Christ, all the things that we do that waste so much time. Let's think about those, and let's spend the rest of our lives refining that precious gift of time to be more efficient and effective in living out the gospel and sharing the gospel with others.

The scripture tells us in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have

everlasting life.” The Bible says in Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you shall be saved.” Is that you today? Do you know that Jesus wants to be your Savior if you repent of your sin today and trust him?

Heavenly Father, we come to you at this time, putting ourselves before you, Lord, saying, “We are your vessels; please use us.” We want to be better about being open to your will. We want to be better at following what it is you want us to do with our lives. We want to be less resistant, Lord. We think about our limitations. We think about our ailments, and we think, “Lord, not me, surely you can call someone who who's smarter. Surely you can call someone who's healthier. Surely you can call somebody who just can speak better and has more energy than I.” That's what we say, but Lord, I pray that you would remove those excuses from us. Help us to be thankful for the bodies you've given us, the minds you've given us, the mouths you've given us, and let us use what you have given us to share this great message with a lost and dying world. Father, I pray for people listening today who've never repented of their sin, people who have never followed Jesus, that today would be the day that they surrender all and follow you.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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