

Reach
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Romans 15:14-21; 30-33

Congratulations! Today is your graduation day from the “**Apostle Paul School of the Christian Life**” --- the book of Romans. Paul’s letter to the believers in Rome is really a complete course in God’s amazing plan of salvation and how to begin to live life as a follower of Christ.

This is a time of year when we’d normally hear about commencement speeches. Sadly, most of them are being delivered via video and at a distance this year due to COVID-19. **Why do we call them “commencement” speeches?**

In Romans 15, Paul’s words sound very much like a commencement speech that commended his readers for their growth and progress, and “pushed them away from the dock” equipped and trained to “commence” their life in Christ.

As he moved toward the end of this letter Paul circled back to the theme he established in chapter one: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”ⁱ Paul began this letter with the message of the gospel and in today’s text he casts a vision for taking that message “where the name of Christ has never been heard.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Big Idea: Each follower of Christ has a part to play in taking the message of the gospel to everyone, everywhere. The book of Romans can equip us to do it.

Let’s begin in Romans 15:13-16. Listen to how Paul’s words sound like a commencement speech to those first century believers and to us. He commended them for their progress then spoke about the future.

Romans 15:13–15a (ESV)

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. ¹⁴ I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. ¹⁵ But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder...

- In verse thirteen Paul greets his graduates with a one-sentence summary of the Spirit-filled life: A life that can be filled by God with “joy and peace” because you have believed. A life that is “abounding in hope” because of the power of the Holy Spirit living in you.

- In verse fourteen Paul commended them on their progress: He was “satisfied” that they were “full of goodness, but in verse fifteen he reminds them he had also “called them out” boldly on some areas for improvement.
- Balanced Bible teaching is a mix of commending God’s people for growing more Christ-like while also confronting us where we fall short.
- Paul also said they gained knowledge to be “able to instruct one another.”
- That’s true for us too! Think of what we’ve learned over the past weeks.
- Within the book of Romans we’ve learned why salvation is required for people to be reconciled with God. (Romans 3:23, 6:23, and 5:8.)
- We’ve learned the basics of salvation: Christ’s atoning death on the cross (3:25, 5:6-11); justification (3:24; 5:1); reconciliation (5:10-14); faith not works (4:1-8); imputed righteousness (4:22); and sanctification (8:28-30).
- We’ve learned we no longer have to be slaves to sin (Romans 6:4-11.)
- We’ve been taught to share how someone can receive God’s free gift of salvation (Romans 10:9-10 - confess, believe, receive.)
- We’ve learned that we are adopted children of God and heirs with Jesus.
- We’ve learned the basics of living the Christ-like life in Romans 12.
- How to live as a light in society and be good citizens (Romans 13.)
- How to have unity despite non-essential differences (Romans 14.)
- Can you believe we’ve learned so much and it was all “online” learning?
- That’s appropriate because when Paul wrote this letter he had not yet been to Rome (15:22.) This was a “correspondence course.”
- To be clear, this study in Romans wasn’t only about theological knowledge or even just a “how to” on living the Christ-like life. As Paul continued his “commencement speech” he points us to the real mission.

Romans 15:15b–21 (ESV)

¹⁵ ...because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; ²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, ²¹ but as it is written,

“Those who have never been told of him will see,
and those who have never heard will understand.”

- Paul’s unique calling from God was to bring the gospel of Christ to Gentiles (and aren’t we Gentiles glad he did!)
- Saved Gentile believers were “offerings” that Paul presented to God.
- Paul looked with pride on the progress of this “graduating class” of Gentiles, but he was careful to give credit where credit belongs: to Jesus.

- Christ accomplished His work “through” Paul’s words and deeds” and by the “power of the Spirit of God.” In Paul’s case, the Spirit had even empowered him to perform “signs and wonders.” (Acts 15:12,19:11-12)
- Wiersbe: *“We may not be able to perform miracles today, since this was a special apostolic gift. But “by word and deed” we can share the love of God with the lost around us. Changes in conduct and character are just as much miracles as the healing of the sick.”*ⁱⁱⁱ
- Christ wants to accomplish His work through the “words and deeds” of each of His followers and His Holy Spirit will empower us to do it.
- Paul’s work had permeated the Roman Empire far and wide but he wasn’t ready to rest. In verse twenty he stated his ambition to preach the gospel where people had not yet heard of Christ. He wanted to come to Rome and eventually to go to what we know today as Spain. In his day this was untamed territory, foreign mission work at its most challenging.
- Before that next phase of mission work could be launched, Paul needed to go back to Jerusalem to deliver famine relief funds the Gentiles were sending to the Jews. There was trouble ahead for Paul in Jerusalem. He would indeed come to Rome and do ministry there, but as a prisoner.
- Before he concluded this “commencement speech,” Paul gave this charge and request to those Roman believers:

Romans 15:30–33 (ESV)

³⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³ May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

- Paul wasn’t seeking fame or praise (he had declared all that belongs to Christ.) He wasn’t even raising funds for his mission work. Paul was asking for fervent, active, intentional prayer for his next phase of work.
- The words “strive together” in your prayers reminds us of how Paul described the prayers of a saint named Epaphras in Colossians 4:12 (NIV) ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.
- Not everyone is called to foreign missions, but we are called to prayer.
- Question for reflection: Do we “wrestle” in prayer for pastors, evangelists, and missionaries? Do we “wrestle in prayer” for those we know and love who haven’t received God’s free gift of salvation in Christ?
- I’m convicted that in this area of my prayer life I may not “work up a sweat” like Epaphras did and like Paul asked the Roman Christians to do.
- What were Paul’s prayer requests?
- To be “delivered from the unbelievers” back in Jerusalem (literally a life and death situation;)

- To carry out “acceptable” service to the saints;”
- And to be able to come and enjoy fellowship (literally to relax) with these Roman Christians.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- This time of year we hear motivational lines from commencement speeches. As I thought of this text in that genre, I imagined what Paul might have told this “graduating class” of first century Christians and us.
- I would never presume to put words in the mouth of the great Apostle, so I took my imaginary “points” from his own letter to the Romans. Here goes:
 - Graduates: Don’t ever be ashamed of the gospel of Christ – that’s the source of power to save the world (1:16-17.)
 - Do your best for God but remember, it’s not about how good you are or how hard you work, salvation is about faith. The righteous LIVE by faith.
 - I’ve taught you about what Jesus did for all mankind and God’s plan to reconcile us to Himself (the Romans Road,) now YOU go and share what it means to confess, believe, and receive eternal life. (10:9-10)
 - You don’t have to be a slave to sin, you can be servant of Christ (Ch.6)
 - There will be suffering. Rejoice anyway because tough times build endurance, character, and help you focus on supernatural hope (5:3-5.)
 - It’s impossible to be good enough in God’s eyes. That’s why Jesus died to cover us in HIS righteousness. Celebrate this every day by living according to His Spirit with in you. He’s the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead; imagine what He can do for you (8:1-11.)
 - When you don’t know how to pray, that same Spirit will help you (8:26-27.)
 - If you’re a follower of Christ, you’re an adopted child and heir (Ch.11.)
 - Act like an heir of the King SHOULD act. Don’t conform to the sin of society; instead, let His word and His presence transform you. (12:1-2)
 - You won’t be perfect in this lifetime, but because of His Spirit you can live, love, and care more and more like Jesus.
 - Be a good citizen because God said to and as a witness for Him (Ch.13.)
 - Be unified with other believers even if they differ with you on “non-essentials not in scripture. It’s about UNITY not UNIFORMITY. (Ch.14)
 - Enjoy the liberty you have in Christ, but don’t let your liberty make a “weaker” believer stumble (14:12-19)
 - As you do His work, don’t boast about yourself, boast about Jesus (Ch.15)
 - And one final word before you toss your mortarboards and commence on this next chapter of living to be like Christ.
 - No matter how tough life gets, God will work it all out for your good and His glory (8:28.) If God is for you, no one can make a dent on your Spirit. Nothing can separate you from His love (8:31-33)
 - Now, go out there and share the love of Jesus and the message of the Gospel to those who haven’t heard.

ⁱ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ro 1:16–17). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Ro 15:20). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 564). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.