

# Marks of a Bold Ministry

## Romans 15:14-21

A famous Methodist evangelist named Peter Cartwright was known for his uncompromising preaching. However, one day when the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson, "Old rough and ready," came to Cartwright's church, the elders warned the Pastor not to offend the President. In those days, the President had great power to influence a denomination for good or bad. Content that their Pastor would not say anything to discredit their church, the elders retired to the back of the sanctuary.

When Cartwright got up to speak, the first words out of his mouth were, "*I understand that President Andrew Jackson is here this morning. I have been requested to be very guarded in my remarks. Let me say this: Andrew Jackson will go to hell if he doesn't repent of his sin!*"

The entire congregation gasped with shock at Cartwright's boldness. How could this young preacher dare to offend the tough old general in public, they wondered. After the service, everyone wondered how the President would respond to Cartwright. When Andrew Jackson met the preacher at the door he looked at him in the eye and said, "*Sir, if I had a regiment of men like you, I could conquer the world!*"

Today we will be looking at Romans 15:14-21, and there is a key word in this passage that we need to take note of, and that word is, "**boldly**," found in verse 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.**" He had written very boldly to them on some points. I believe we could echo a hearty 'Amen!' at that statement!

Think about what Paul has written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His description of human sinfulness in chapters 1-3 is unparalleled. His declaration of the exclusive nature of the gospel in chapters 3-5 left no room for compromising with pagan worship or Jewish legalism or trying with our works to earn merit with God. Who could explain more powerfully the work of dying to sin and the ongoing work of sanctification by the Spirit than what the apostle did in chapters 6-8? Paul's teaching on election, and God's predetermined plan to save both Jews and Gentiles in 9-11 hit us like a ton of bricks! And then, how about the application of the gospel in the life of the church in chapters 12-15? Paul gave no room for harboring ill feelings toward others in the body or for neglecting to use one's spiritual gift for the good of the church or for remaining in sensual habits or for walking over a brother or sister who is weak. Yes, he wrote very boldly on some points!

Now as Paul is closing his letter to the Romans he feels the need to explain his purposes more clearly. Although Paul knew many believers in Rome, he had never been to that church. He had not planted that church, and yet by God's grace as an apostle he had written to them quite boldly.

So in this last section of Roman Paul first tells them the reasons for his boldness in verses 14-21. Next he tells them his plans for the future in verses 22-33. Then he gives many personal greetings in chapter 16, and finally a benediction at the end of chapter 16.

**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.**

**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,**

**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.**

**17 Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.**

**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--**

**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.**

**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,**

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

Today I want us to take a few minutes to understand the marks of Paul's bold ministry. I hope that seeing Paul's example we will all be able to minister, to serve Christ more boldly and effectively. Although Paul was an apostle, and none of us have that gift and calling, the New Testament is clear that all of us as believers in Jesus Christ are called to serve Christ, to minister others with the spiritual gifts God has given to us.

So let's apply Paul's example to ourselves.

### **1. A bold minister affirms others in their gifts and ministries (15:14)**

Paul was not afraid to be bold and blunt when he had to be but he also knew that words of encouragement provide great motivation. Romans 15:14 shows how Paul affirms these Roman Christians in their gifts and ministries. **"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."**

As I said, Paul had not been to the church at Rome. But chapter 16 will show us that he knew many of the members of that church personally. And this church had a great reputation. Back in Romans 1:8, Paul had written to them, **"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of**

**throughout the whole world.”** Paul knew many of the believers in Rome and he knew their reputation for faith.

By calling them “**my brethren**” he’s focusing on the fact that they are all family. Paul then gives them three specific affirmations that reveal how he sees these Christians at Rome. These affirmations give us a good picture of a healthy church full of spiritually healthy members.

- **They are full of goodness.** “Goodness” is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and denotes uprightness in conduct (Eph. 5:9) or kindness and generosity towards others (2 Thess. 1:11; Moo, p. 888). This kind of moral goodness, means that they lived Romans 12:9, hating what is evil and clinging to what is good. It means they were practicing Romans 12:21, “**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**” “Full of goodness” doesn’t mean they never sinned but that they pursued noble and God-honoring actions in the broad scope of their lives.

- **They are complete in knowledge.** “Filled with all knowledge” implies a well-rounded knowledge, especially about God’s Word and its application. They were not only a people with good hearts; their heads were filled with the right things. They were not being conformed to this world but were being transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:2). Their doctrine was right on.

- **They are competent to admonish.** “Able also to admonish one another” shows the extent of their spiritual development. The word admonish means literally to “place in the mind.” They had the ability to ‘lay to the mind’ the truths of Scripture to help one another toward spiritual maturity. They could admonish, encourage, advise, counsel and warn each other. It’s the idea of having a corrective influence. These believers were doing life together and were able to lead someone away from a false path into a true path using warnings and wisdom from the Word of God.

Why does Paul say such affirming things to this church? It is because his heart is for them and not against them. He says it because it is true in spite of their human weakness. He says it because he loves them and longs to see them grow to full maturity. Most of all, he says it because he has enormous confidence in God’s grace at work in their midst.

If they are full of goodness, it is because the God of goodness is at work in them.

If they filled with all knowledge, it is because God Himself has filled them with knowledge of His word.

If they are able to admonish each other, it’s is because God has equipped them by His Spirit.

It is always easy to criticize and pick fault with others. But the faultfinder is like a spiritual vulture, flying over the landscape, looking for the failures of others so he can pounce on them. How much better to be like Paul and affirm what is good and god-like in others.

Secondly,

## 2. A bold minister reminds others of God' truth (15:15).

Although Paul was confident of their spiritual growth, he wrote to them boldly to remind them of what they knew. Verse 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."**

I learned so much from the teaching of Chaplain Charlie Baldwin at the Air Force Academy. He used to say, "If I say the same things again and again, it's only because I repeat myself. So if you hear me repeating myself, it's only because I say the same things again and again." It's a fact that most of us learn by repetition. The word **"remind"** means to "call back to mind" and the Bible is filled with reminders about the importance of remembering.

***Now I would remind you, brothers*** (1 Corinthians 15:1).

***For this reason I remind you*** (2 Timothy 1:6).

***Remind them of these things*** (2 Timothy 2:14).

***Remind them to be submissive*** (Titus 3:1).

***I always intend to remind you*** (1 Peter 1:12).

***It is only right that I should keep on reminding you as long as I live*** (2 Peter 1:13).

***I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder*** (2 Peter 3:1).

***Now I want to remind you*** (Jude 5).

I sometimes hear Christians say that they long for the "meat of the Word." Let me remind you of what Hebrews 5:14 says about mature believers: ***"But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."***

Did you catch that? It is ***"those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."*** As James says, ***"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."*** It is by continuing in the word, doing the word that we become mature. We need to be reminded of the truths of scripture over and over again.

This is God's plan for spiritual growth. We must tell people the great truths of Scripture, and then we must tell them again. Once is never enough.

We must tell them who God is. Then we must tell them again.

We must proclaim the truth about Jesus. Then we must tell them again.

We must show men their sin. Then we must show them again.

We must tell them that they are hopelessly lost. And we must tell them again and again.

We must let them know that God loves them. This we must say many times.

We must proclaim the wondrous news that God sent his Son to save us from our sins. And tell it again and again and again.

We must call men to faith and repentance. And call them again.

We must show them how they can be saved and find assurance of forgiveness. And then we must show them again.

We must proclaim the great truths of scripture over and over again, in many different ways, from many different texts, proclaiming all the doctrines of grace with all the power and strength and wisdom and boldness that God gives us.

And then we must do it again!

Do you turn your mind off when you hear things you've already heard? Do you find yourself always wanting that which is new and novel? Don't forget to remember what you need to be reminded of.

### **3. A bold minister offers service to God as worship (Rom. 15:16)**

The word "offer" means to *bring before*. In verse 16 we see that we're to offer the people we reach to the Lord: **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.**

This verse is full of language from the Temple sacrificial system. Paul sees his role like that of a priest offering up a sweet salvation sacrifice of the Gentiles to God. Paul is not setting up a special class of Christian priests, who are intermediaries between the "common" people and God. That would negate what he says in Ephesians 2:18, "**For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.**" In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul writes, "**For *there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.***" Jesus alone is our high priest. We all have direct access to God's throne through Him (Heb. 4:14-16). Rather, Paul is giving us an illustration of how we all should serve the Lord: as believer priests, we should offer up as worship to Him any results or fruit of our ministries that God gives us through the gospel.

The New Testament teaches that we are all priests. Revelation 1:6 says, "***and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.***" 1 Peter 2 says, "**But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.**"

That priesthood of every believer not only means that we have direct access to God through Jesus Christ, but that we also are those who serve Him in worship by offering spiritual sacrifices to God.

While ministry helps others either to get saved or to grow in Christ, your primary aim in ministry should not be to help others, but to minister to the Lord (see Acts 13:2; 2 Sam. 6:14-21). You want your service to be an offering that is acceptable to Him, "sanctified by the Holy Spirit." You don't serve for the praise that you get

from others or even primarily for the satisfaction of seeing others helped. You do it as an act of worship to God.

#### 4. A bold minister serves for the glory of God (Rom. 15:17-18)

All that we do should bring glory to God and not to ourselves. We saw this in the language of worship in verse 17 and now in the language of boasting in Romans 15:18: **“Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. 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.”**

**“I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus,”** his could literally be translated as, *“I have boasting in Christ Jesus...”* It is always wrong to boast in ourselves, but it is right to boast in the Lord. Paul is the instrument but God is the worker. It’s as if he’s saying, *“If any part of my ministry does not stem from God’s work through me, I don’t even want to talk about it.”* The people God chooses and uses are those who see themselves as instruments, no more and no less.

It’s time to stop boasting about what we’ve done and instead let’s boast only in what God has done. When someone compliments you this week, give the credit to Christ. Let’s make Paul’s statement in Galatians 6:14 our prayer: **“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom[fn] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”**

#### 5. A bold minister proclaims in God’s power through God’s plan (Rom. 15:19-21)

If we go back to Romans 15:16 we see that Paul was all about **“ministering the gospel of God”** and in Romans 15:19-21 we see that he did so with power and by God’s plan. *When we get the gospel, we will go with the gospel.*

- **Through God’s power.** Look at verse 19a: **“in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God ...”** God promised power to His followers when the Holy Spirit came upon them in Acts 1:8. **“Signs”** are a visible manifestation of an invisible reality that should point us to the Savior. Signs and wonders were a sign of apostleship and were needed to confirm and affirm the authenticity of the gospel message in the first century. We see this in 2 Corinthians 12:12: **“Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.”** None of us are apostles and God does not need to confirm His word again by signs and wonders like He did at the beginning of the church. Having said that, we should expect to see the power of the Holy Spirit unleashed as we share the gospel message with others today. God’s Holy Spirit still does the miraculous work of spiritual birth as He draws sinners to Christ in repentance and faith.

- **With strategic priority.** We see in Romans 15:19-20 that Paul was intentional, not indifferent in his ministry: **“...so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 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.”**

If you trace Paul's travels you can see an arc or half-circle of evangelistic emphasis from Jerusalem in the southeast to the region of Illyricum in the northwest, a span of 1,400 miles. The word **"fully"** literally reads, *"I have filled full the gospel"* and could mean that he preached the full gospel message or preached in the full geographical area. Paul's driving ambition was to fully discharge what had been entrusted to him.

To **"preach the gospel"** refers to declaring glad tidings. Paul's priority was to be a pioneer and preach Christ to those who hadn't yet heard. Paul was all about new frontiers and new foundations.

· **With Scriptural precedent.** Paul focused on new frontiers, new foundations and new faces! As he likes to do, he punches his point home by quoting from the Old Testament, this time from Isaiah 52:15 to show that God's heart is for those who haven't heard. The context here deals with Gentiles. Check out verse 21: ***"but as it is written: 'To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.'"***

Our passion should be that God's glory be known so that He is worshipped around the globe. John Piper wrote, "You're either a goer, a sender, or disobedient." If you're not passionate about missions, it may be because you're not passionate about God. Listen, the next person you meet may need to meet Christ. Will you tell them the good news?

## **Fleshing This Out in Families**

Today is Father's Day. As I looked at these six words, it strikes me that these principles not only apply to ministry in the church, but they also totally apply to parenting (and grandparenting). As we close let's take another look at them through the lenses of family life.

**1. Affirm.** While it's important to discipline and be firm, our children also need affirmed and encouraged. When's the last time you caught your child doing something right and then paid him or her a compliment? Do your children know that you're for them and not against them? Here are three specific ways we can build into our kids.

· **Help them be filled with goodness.** Focus on their hearts and celebrate a good attitude and a good action when you see it.

· **Help complete their knowledge.** Make sure their heads are filled with the right things.

· **Admonish them to do what's right.** As parents we must consistently and constantly provide counsel for our kids.

## **2. Remind.**

Most parents feel like all they're doing is reminding their children to clean their room, clean up after the dog, or clean up their behavior. It's wearisome to have to repeat ourselves, isn't it? But that's part and parcel of parenting. We also need to be reminding our children of the importance of giving to the Lord, of serving, of

reading their Bibles, etc. They also need to be reminded of God's forgiveness when they mess up and they need constant reminders of our love.

### **3. Offer.**

Parents, if we get this one, it will totally transform how we see our roles. My responsibility is to offer up our children to the Lord by interceding for them and by presenting them to Him for His purposes. They belong to Him, not to me.

### **4. Glory.**

We must teach our kids that life does not revolve around them. Life is all about Jesus Christ and our lives are for His glory.

### **5. Proclaim.**

We must proclaim the gospel in word and deed to our children as we live out our faith at home. We must also model the importance of proclaiming the gospel to those who don't yet know Jesus, and we can do that as families.

*When we get the gospel, we will go with the gospel.* What are you going to do in the next seven days?