

Chapter 67

Paul, Apostle and Theologian

(Romans 15:14–21)

The main message of Paul's letter to the Romans finished at Romans 15:13. Now he has a number of smaller matters to deal with.

Although Paul writes with great confidence as an apostle of Jesus, at the same time he wants others to feel loved and accepted. **He is confident about their maturity.** ¹⁴*Now I myself really am convinced, my brothers and sisters, concerning you, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.* Christian teachers and apostles are not superior to other Christians. They simply have different gifts. **He explains again his own ministry.** ¹⁵*But I have written to you to some extent rather boldly as someone giving you a reminder through the grace given to me for you from God.* Why are pastors and teachers needed? Their work is one of reminding people. It is surprising to find Paul describing his famous letter as simply 'a reminder'! But Paul's letters are just the outlines of what he could have said at greater length. New Testament letters need expounding rather than summarizing! A Christian teacher often tells people what they already know. Afterwards they say, 'I have always believed that but now you have helped me to see it more clearly.' Exactly! **Paul is very conscious of his call.** ¹⁶*The purpose of God's grace is that I should be a servant of Christ Jesus to the gentiles like a priest administering the gospel of God, in order that*

the offering of the gentiles might become pleasing to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. He knows he is specially called to gentiles. He is daring to speak to them in such a way because he knows that he has a calling from God to do so. **He is a man with a long-term purpose.** His goal and longing for the gentiles is that they should be offered up to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. He is **like** a priest of the Old Testament. His work is to present to God the churches of the gentile world outside of Israel. He aims that his readers should becoming living sacrifices to God. He is just like a ‘priest’ in helping them make their sacrifice. Paul is a model of what it means to have a pioneering ministry.

1. **Paul regards Christian ministry as a great privilege.** ¹⁷*Therefore I have this privilege in Christ Jesus with respect to the things of God.* ‘Therefore’ means because of God’s call in his life.

2. **He knows his message and his calling.** He knows that he is an ‘apostle to the gentiles’ and that teaching the Christians at Rome comes into his area of responsibility. His authority has to do with ‘the things of God’. It is not the result of education or intellectual ability or a decision to have Christian work as one’s career.

3. **Paul evaluates his ministry realistically.** He describes his work without exaggeration. He is not claiming for himself anything that has been achieved by other people. ¹⁸*For I will not dare to speak of anything that Christ has not accomplished through me for the obedience of the gentiles, in word and deed . . .* It was a ministry ‘in word and deed’. He was primarily a speaker but his words were not empty words. They were accompanied with power. Lives were changed as a result of God’s ministry through him. Paul’s ministry was a ministry ¹⁹*in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit.* ‘Signs and wonders’ refers to miraculous events. The early Christians would pray for signs and wonders. ‘Stretch out your hands to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders’, they prayed (Acts 4:30). These miracles were an invitation to faith, although they did not

compel faith, and they were subordinate to the preaching of God's Word. We are right if we also want signs and wonders, but we will not allow signs and wonders to lead us into a twisted gospel. Paul's ministry was a ministry 'in the power of the Spirit'.

4. **Paul's ministry was always developing.** As he writes this letter, he is drawing near to a new phase of his work. He says: *As a result, from Jerusalem and travelling around as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ . . .* His work was that of a pioneer. He had fully preached the gospel,

²⁰in this way making it my intention to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, in order that I might not build on another person's foundation, ²¹but even as it is written,

*'Those to whom it has not been announced concerning him will see,
and those who have not heard will understand.'*

One has to admire the great apostle. He is getting on in years. If he was a young man in his twenties (about twenty-four years of age perhaps) at the time of his conversion in about AD 34, and if he is writing 'Romans' in about AD 62, then he is perhaps about fifty-two years old. At fifty-two years old (roughly) he is planning to totally leave to other people the work he has started in the eastern part of his God-given 'parish'. And he has plans to travel west to areas where he has never in his life been before. Paul has firmly laid down the foundations of the churches in the eastern part of the Mediterranean lands. 'As a result, from Jerusalem and travelling around as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ . . .', he says (15:19). In each place his work had been that of a pioneer and church-planter. He says he makes it his intention 'to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, in order that I might not build on another person's foundation (15:20), but even as it is written, "Those to

Paul, Apostle and Theologian

whom it has not been announced concerning him will see, and those who have not heard will understand” (15:21). Paul obviously loved to be first: an evangelist. He loved to be a father establishing his children. He wanted to be an establisher of churches, an apostle. And Paul is of course famous as a ‘theologian’. The greatest ‘theologian’ of all time was an evangelist, a pastor, an establisher of churches. His ‘theology’ was preached and written for the ordinary men and women to be found in the churches of the East Mediterranean. His readers included slaves and even children. He quotes Isaiah 52: ‘but even as it is written, “Those to whom it has not been announced concerning him will see, and those who have not heard will understand”’ (15:21). Most preachers who have any kind of theological gift such as Paul had, or who like to write something of substance as Paul did, will want to write for fellow ministers or for fellow scholars. Not Paul. He put preaching above writing. And he had the ordinary person in view when he preached and wrote. Would that all theologians had the same kind of heart!