



ROMANS Part 131

Chapter 15:14-17

Paul acts as a priest to the nations of God's latest revelation.



14 Now I myself also am persuaded concerning you, my brethren, that you yourselves also are bulging with goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to be admonishing one another. 15 Yet more daringly do I write to you, in part, as prompting you, because of the

grace being given to me from God, 16 for me to be the minister of Christ Jesus for the nations, acting as a priest of the evangel of God, that the approach present of the nations may be becoming well received, having been hallowed by holy spirit. 17 I have, then, a boast in Christ Jesus, in that which is toward God.

“Admonishing” is the Greek word *noutheteo*, a two-part word whose English elements are MIND-PLACE. The saints ought to be perfectly capable of admonishing one another, helping one another to keep minds placed at the proper angle, that is, upward. Paul wrote in another place, “Set your affections on things above” (Colossians 3:2). That’s the angle I’m talking about. “Above” is where we are to situate our minds and to encourage other minds to be situated. Since Paul isn’t around much to spur us on, it behooves us to do this for one another.

I apologize to all those who thought that maybe this admonishment thing meant that one could critique other saints for such things as their reading habits, eating habits, or how often they clean their fingernails. Please refrain. You must note the words coming before “admonish,” namely, “bulging with goodness” and “filled with all knowledge.” Good people avoid micro-managing others’ lives, and a fullness of knowledge includes the understanding that we all possess our treasure in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). This does not mean that we cannot warn a fellow saint of a horrendous sin (such as watching Joel Osteen), or help pull someone from the ledge of self-destruction (again, watching Osteen). It means that we shouldn’t care too much if another believer drinks diet soda containing Aspartame or votes for Hillary Clinton. Sometimes people have to learn the hard way. “Keep your eyes upon Christ” is the better admonishment. Who knows? Such a fine admonition may help one to give up soda and politics altogether.



“Yet more daringly do I write to you, in part, as prompting you, because of the grace being given to me from God” (Romans 15:15).

People of spirit can afford to be daring—theoretically. By theoretically, I mean that people who have been saved by grace ought to know to exercise grace as they prompt one another. Like this: “Yet become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, dealing graciously among yourselves, according as God also, in Christ, deals graciously with you” (Ephesians 4:32). One can be tenderly compassionate and tough at the same time. (I’ll admit, it’s a good trick.) Unfortunately, some have yet to learn the ways of seasoning their salt with grace. Paul’s love certainly did not tiptoe through the tulips, but neither did it whack down whole flower beds with a scythe. Paul admonished aplenty, at the same time realizing that each saint possessed his or her own measure of faith. No one can operate at a faith level higher than that given to them by God.

“...for me to be the minister of Christ Jesus for the nations, acting as a priest of the evangel of God, that the approach present of the nations may be becoming well received, having been hallowed by holy spirit” (Romans 15:16).

All of this is figurative. Paul was not a real priest; he was only acting as one. The analogy is apt, however, considering the recent failure of Jerusalem. As A.E. Knoch writes in his *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*—

While the priests at Jerusalem still offered the sacrifices according to the law, their ministrations were not acceptable to God, for they had rejected the true Lamb of God. God had no pleasure in the blood of slain beasts, for the hearts of the offerers were far from Him. Is it not a marvel how God, in His wisdom, finds true worshipers among the despised aliens, who offer themselves as living sacrifices well pleasing to Him? In spirit, Paul’s ministry among the nations takes the place of the divine ritual at Jerusalem. He officiates as a priest. Though not sanctified by the altar at Jerusalem, they were hallowed by the holy Spirit. So it ought to be today. Though the temple worship has ceased, it is our privilege so to walk as to be a sweet savor of Christ.

Paul was the divinely appointed intermediary of a new gospel, taking God’s previously hidden message of transcendent grace (“where sin increases, grace superexceeds—Romans 5:20) and giving it to anyone who would listen, beginning with the despised nations. Israel had rejected Christ, and with that rejection the presence of God



left the temple. In accord with Paul's new message, the spirit of God now made its home in individual believers (1 Corinthians 3:16). With the temple at Jerusalem vacated, the divine presence now resided in a bunch of non-Israelites walking around as living sacrifices, doing nice things, being kind to one another, losing all confidence in flesh, reminding one another to place their minds on things above.

This is why none of the Pauline saints "went to church." It's the same reason we moderns don't go. Going to church smacks of attending the abandoned temple. Who in the world would want to disinter such a dinosaur? Besides, it is impossible for us to *go* to church, because we *are* the church. The church is a people, not a building.

We don't need a priest; we look directly into the face of Christ (1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 4:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18) via an evangel that removes all barriers between us and God (Ephesians 2:13-15), placing Christ in our very midst (Colossians 1:27). Paul is our "priest," and the "priesthood" is the information dispensed from heaven into his letters, through his pen.

"I have, then, a boast in Christ Jesus, in that which is toward God" (Romans 15:17).

Who wouldn't want to claim on his resume: "I have been appointed by God Himself to replace the most fabled building in Jerusalem—the temple—with living temples, animated holy places going by names like Trophimus, Luke, Phoebe, Jason and Gaius—who fulfill the just requirements of the law, not *through* law, but through the holy spirit and the love of God shed abroad in their hearts (Romans 2:14-15). This is Paul's legitimate boast in Christ Jesus. It's the role passed on to him by God, through Christ. All points toward God. Though Paul is a channel, he recognizes God as the source. Paul typically boasts of his weakness, not his strength (2 Corinthians 11:30). It's no different here. God used a weak vessel, not a strong one, to take the message of the transcendent grace of God to non-Israelites.

It worked. Weak Paul—the sinner saved by grace—became the pattern of all those who would believe after him, for life eonian (1 Timothy 1:16).

Welcome to the club. —MZ