



# ROMANS Part 132

Chapter 15:18-22

## Announcing the evangel to those who have not heard.



**For I am not daring to speak any of what Christ does not effect through me for the obedience of the nations, in word and work, 19 in the power of signs and miracles, in the power of God’s spirit, so that, from Jerusalem and around unto Illyricum, I have completed the evangel of the Christ. 20 Yet thus I am ambitious to be bringing the evangel where Christ is not named lest I may be building on another’s foundation, 21 but, according as it is written, “They who were not informed concerning**

**Him shall see, And they who have not heard shall understand.” 22 Wherefore I was much hindered also in coming to you.**

I depart from Paul in that I am quite daring to speak many things that Christ does not effect through me for the sake of the evangel, such as how I was so depressed the other day that I ate five McDonald’s hamburgers and a half a box of Lucky Charms cereal for lunch—the cereal raw out of the box, while standing in a parking lot, bending over to retrieve and consume mishandled marshmallow bits directly off the blacktop. Paul would never have shared that information. For one thing, Lucky Charms had not been invented. I am betting that Paul’s era boasted its version of McDonald’s—probably McDagon’s, or something like that—similarly as evil but tasting just as good.

But what Paul probably means here is that he’s not going to talk about any evangelistic activity among the nations except that done by him. Paul will withhold from us everything except that which pertains directly to the nations and their faith, and which proceeds directly from the mouth of this particular horse. Paul is crazy about the evangel; crazy about getting his facts right; crazy about telling the Romans everything he knows about everything.

“OBEDIENCE”

Grace people tend to lose their cool when seeing a word like “obedience” coming from Paul’s pen. It seems to them as though Paul is resurrecting law. The English word “obedience” results from a two-part Greek word, *hupakoe*. “Hup” is “under” and “akoe” is “hearing,” and together they make UNDER-HEARING.

The proper definition of “obey” (from page 209 of the Keyword Concordance in the *Concordant Literal*

*New Testament*), is “to hear and to heed.” To hear and to heed simply means to hear and to heed. The nations heard Paul’s message, and they heeded it. They heard and heeded the message that “Jesus Christ did everything to save you, and you do nothing.” Because of our religious training, whenever we see “obedience” we quickly assume law. There’s no need for it. We instantly import into “obedience” the thought of hard work and unhappiness. But what’s so unhappy about obeying a gospel that dispenses with obedience?

## SIGNS AND MIRACLES

**“...in the power of signs and miracles, in the power of God’s spirit...” (Romans 15:19).**

Paul’s message began with signs and miracles to legitimize it both among the Jews and Greeks; there’s nothing like a lame man walking to start people talking. Signs and miracles lent Paul’s early work a necessary boost, although the plan all along was to eventually discard signs and miracles so that faith might stand alone.

I found a funny little blog with an article titled, “The Secret to Apostle Paul’s Unusual Miracles”—as though there’s a secret to it, as in a random grocery store magazine headline pronouncing, “The Secret to Six-Pack Abs,” or “The Secret To Younger-Looking Skin.” You might do sit-ups for the abs and apply coconut oil for the skin, but what’s the recipe for effecting unusual miracles? Should one eat more cucumbers? Do chinning exercises from a tree branch?

One of Paul’s “unusual miracles” was that articles of clothing having contacted his skin drove diseases and evil spirits from the weak and afflicted. Here is Acts 19:11-12 from the *Concordant Literal New Testament*—

Besides, powerful deeds, not the casual kind, God did through the hands of Paul, so the handkerchiefs or aprons from his cuticle are carried away to the infirm also, to clear the diseases from them. Besides, wicked spirits go out.

“From his cuticle” is a strange way of saying that articles of clothing that had touched Paul’s person made people whole. The Greek word translated “cuticle” here is *chros*, and the English element is INTEGUMENT. Ever hear of the integumentary system? It’s your skin. A strict definition of “cuticle” is “epidermis.” I think of it chiefly as the non-living epidermis surrounding the edges of the fingernail or toenails (thank you, “dictionary.com”), but it’s actually *not* chiefly that; it’s simply the outer layer of the human body.



What sort of “secret” made Paul’s used clothing so miraculous? And what about Peter’s shadow? People received healing from the mere touch of Peter blocking the sun (Acts 5:15). What’s the “secret” to that? There is no secret. It’s an unconscious act on both ends. The sun shines; Peter walks; men and women jump from their pallets.

As an aside, I like the following Acts chapter 19 wording—“Powerful deeds, not the casual kind, God did through the hands of Paul.” Who wouldn’t want to answer an interrogator concerning one’s supernatural deeds: “My miracles? Well, they are not the *casual* kind, I can assure you of *that*.”

Miracles were, in that day, God’s seal of approval of whomever worked them. Generally, the workers were Scripture writers. The citizenry of that day needed help recognizing these ordinary-looking, soft-spoken men as conduits of God’s truth. Once God completed the Scriptures, miracles generally vanished. Now they are mostly fake; they are Satanic deceptions luring unwitting wannabe disciples into dirty religions. Folks getting hooked on miracles easily forget Scripture. How ironic; miracles at one time *led* to Scripture. Now they detract from it. Paul wants us dependent on God alone, through the channel of faith.

Miracles get things rolling, yes, but too much adrenaline stultifies faith, creating dependency upon the supernatural hit. The further Paul took truth, the further and farther apart came his otherworldly deeds. One day, they disappeared completely, leaving faith. Faith became—and still is—the ideal state. Faith is “a conviction concerning matters that are not being observed” (Hebrews 11:1).

Miracles, obviously, cater to the eyes.

## STARTING FROM SCRATCH

**“So that, from Jerusalem and around unto Illyricum, I have completed the evangel of the Christ. 20 Yet thus I am ambitious to be bringing the evangel where Christ is not named lest I may be building on another’s foundation” (Romans 15:19-20).**

Paul’s thing was going “*around* unto Illyricum”—and around everything else, for that matter. This man rarely drew a straight line between two cities or districts; he was not what you would call an “as-the-crow-flies” kind of guy. His was a wide swath. In the history of Acts, there is no record of Paul having brought the evangel to Illyricum, which is modern-day Slovenia (situated between Austria and Croatia). Rather, Illyricum marked the boundary of Paul’s westward reach. He never got into the place, but nudged up *to* it.

The important thing to note is that Paul “completed the evangel of Christ.” This means that he took his specific gospel of the grace of God into all the places where the citizenry had already heard of Christ. It was helpful, in these places, not having to explain from scratch names like “Jesus Christ,” “Peter,” “Abraham,” and “Moses.” Was it a little too easy? Paul wanted more. Relishing a challenge, the apostle dove into places where the aforementioned names went unspoken and even unknown. Paul would break the ice; he’d start from scratch.

I take back what I said about Paul relishing a challenge. This latter exercise (preaching to the ignorant) might have afforded the apostle far less stress. Nothing is more challenging than bringing Christ to people who assume that they already know Him. They can’t hear new truth for the obscuring filter of old preconceptions. For those already “in the know,” Paul had to knock down cardboard cut-outs of either a Circumcision Christ or a Fake Jesus before presenting the true Son of God. Then, as now, the religious easily gravitate toward a different Savior than the One Paul knew (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Paul had no desire to conquer the glory market; there

was enough glory to go around. Several qualified teachers labored among those who’d already heard of Christ. Paul thanked God for these heralds as long as they broadcasted the correct message and kept law as far away from grace as possible. Heading out to where Christ was not named—pioneering new territory—would have been just what the doctor ordered for a Type-A personality like Paul’s. I think that our apostle would have joined the Apollo moon mission if he thought there were lunar humans hungry for grace and peace.

## FULFILLING SCRIPTURE

**“But, according as it is written, ‘They who were not informed concerning Him shall see, And they who have not heard shall understand.’ 22 Wherefore I was much hindered also in coming to you” (Romans 15:21-22.)**

Paul loosely quotes Isaiah 52:15 here—

So shall He startle many nations; Over Him kings shall shut their mouths; For that which had not been related to them they see, And of that which they had not heard they gain understanding.

Paul rightly sees himself as fulfilling Scripture. Imagine reading the Bible and then realize that it’s talking about you; that the prophets, though not exactly foreseeing you, saw the work that God would do through you. The higher the call, the more resistance one ought to expect against it. “Wherefore I was much hindered also in coming to you.”

These hindrances come in many forms, from transportation hassles to computer glitches (papyrus glitches for Paul, or trouble finding scribes) to recalcitrant politicians. Wherever effort exists to extend the territory of Paul’s transcendent message, trouble waits in the wings. Satan *will* hinder such a message. It may actually be easier going to the moon than bringing the evangel to a hardened heart. May God, therefore, cause us to encounter hearts of a softened variety, for His glory.

It really does happen once in a blue moon. —MZ



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