

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] The Scripture reading for this morning is Romans 15:14-21. So if you have your New Testaments turn with me to Romans chapter 15, and verse 14. The apostle begins at this point the conclusion of his letter in which he speaks of certain plans and purposes that he has of a personal nature as well as some greetings of individuals in the church at Rome.

So we are on the final stages of our exposition of this epistle. The Lord willing, I would like to devote a message to the last section of Romans 15 and then perhaps just two, to Romans 16 and then we will be through with our study of the Epistle to the Romans.

Beginning with verse 14, now the apostle having given his messages and exhortation concerning debatable things, writes,

"And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, (now I think it's important to notice that last clause because when the apostle writes, 'Because of the grace that is given to me of God,' he does not mean grace in general but although, of course, that idea is certainly a scriptural one. But what he has in mind is the grace of the gift of apostleship. Now that is evident from other places in which he uses this same expression, 'The grace that is given to him of God.' That is, this wonderful privilege to serve as the apostle of Jesus Christ. Then in verse 16 he continues): That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. I have therefore that of which I may glory through Jesus Christ (literally in Jesus Christ), in those things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought through me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed. (Now the 'by word' and 'deed' is not a reference to the Gentiles but the things that Christ has done in word and in deed. In word through the Holy Spirit and the conviction of sin and conversion. And then deed, as he goes on to point out, the miracles and signs that were performed by the apostle. Verse 19): Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Illyricum is that part of Greece which is today generally the territories of Yugoslavia and Albania. So the apostle speaks of having fully preached the gospel all around the circle from Jerusalem to Northern Greece. He does not mean, of course, that he has preached the gospel to every individual but that he has given a representative testimony to that whole area.) Yea, (he says) so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: (and when he says, 'Where Christ was named,' he means named and confessed as savior. The use of the term in

other places indicates that he's speaking of a naming of Christ that means genuine salvation. Not simply that he was known.) But as it is written, (and here he cites Isaiah chapter 52, and verse 15,) To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand."

He applies here a text which in the Old Testament has to do with the servant of Jehovah to the Lord Jesus Christ. For the apostle regarded the Lord Jesus Christ as the servant of the Lord.

The subject, the exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, is "Christ's Priest to the Gentiles." The principal theological argumentation of the Epistle to the Romans is at an end and Paul at Romans chapter 15, and verse 14, turns to his personal plans and ministry. It's not surprising that this section has been, though, to be important for principles of ministry because in it the apostle speaks of the principles that have been guiding him in his apostolic ministry.

In fact, I think it is fair to say that one may learn something very important about the nature of ministry, about the extent of ministry, and particularly about the power of ministry in these words that Paul speaks. You notice that he speaks them against a Trinitarian background. I know that people when we hear the term 'the trinity' tend to think of a systematic theology that is largely meaningless for our daily lives. But if you will examine the apostle's words and his thought throughout his epistles you will discover that the doctrine of the trinity was very significant for him.

In fact, it is not overstressing it to say, as John Murray has said, that Paul's thought was conditioned by the doctrine of the Trinity and particularly by the distinguishing properties and prerogatives of the three persons in the economy of salvation. We know from our study of the Bible that it is the Father who initiates the plan of redemption in his divine election. It is the Son who carries out the will of the Father by offering himself up as a redemptive sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. And it is the Holy Spirit who administrates this great work by being responsible for the regeneration of those whom the Father has chosen and bringing them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and the reception of that forgiveness of sins.

The apostle does not artificially weave references to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit into his writing but rather he writes out of a deep-felt association with the ideas that the doctrine of the trinity represent. And so it's not surprising then when we turn to this section to find that again this Trinitarian background conditions the apostle's thought.

Just for example he says in the 16th verse, "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ," the second person of the trinity, "to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God." Now the term God may apply to any of the three persons of the trinity but in this case due to the mention in a moment of the Holy Spirit it evidently is a reference to the Father. "Ministering the gospel of God," God the Father, the first person, "that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit," the third person of the trinity.

Now some tend to read this section since it has to do with the apostle's form of ministry as the apostle of the Gentiles as if the apostle is the central figure. If you've been around Christian circles very long you probably have heard a message in which this section has been taken in a missionary context in order to point out to the audience the

proper way of doing missionary work. And the result is that the important person in this section becomes the Apostle Paul, he's the central figure. But that is a big error. For the central figure here is not the Apostle Paul, the central figure is Jesus Christ. And the apostle writes of Christ, "What Christ has done through me."

Now we have to keep our eyes exclusively on Jesus Christ if we are to understand what Paul is saying, he's the one who is performing the work. Now, he uses the instrumentality of the Apostle Paul. To that extent we may modify the adverb exclusively. But if we are to understand this section, in fact if we are to understand any of Paul's writings, we must keep God first and foremost before us and then the human instrumentalities in a far, secondary, and inferior place. Paul's great secret, if there is a secret here, is the secret of grace in the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

He says in verse 15, for example, "Because of the grace that is given to me of God," his apostolic ministry. And then in verse 17 he says, "I have therefore that of which I may glory in Christ Jesus," in those things that pertain to God. He may glory but only in Christ. And finally in verse 18 he says, "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not wrought by me," a negative way of saying he will only glory in the things that God has done through him. It is through the instrumentality of the apostle. It is Jesus Christ who has performed the great works.

When I was growing up, I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, and I can remember moving to Charleston from Alabama and some of my relatives in Charleston took me out first to the Atlantic Ocean because this was when I was very young and that was the thing to do in the summer, to go out to the beach, one of the beaches around Charleston, and it was the first time I had seen the ocean and it was in late August. And in late August in those days, I don't know how it is today, but in the Atlantic there was quite a bit of undertow off of that island. And we were warned, I was warned particularly, the other boys knew about the undertow, I was warned, "Do not get out very far because the undertow will just pick your feet off of the beach and soon you'll be out so far that we'll have to call for the coastguard to pick you up." And sure enough when I got out and the water was just less than my waist I felt such a tug that I hastened to get back a little bit in shallower water in order to escape being lost.

Well the apostle speaks in something of that kind of vein because he speaks here of being caught up in a current, the undertow. The undertow of the will of God. It was for me on Folly Beach an undertow of destruction if I were to be so foolish as to give myself up to the undertow. But here it was an undertow that was a saving stream. It was launched on the sea of the nations and the apostle was caught up in it. And he discovered that in the work that God had given him to do the Lord Jesus Christ preceded him in that work.

When he arrived in the city of Corinth, for example, and finally found his way into prison there appeared to him the Lord Jesus who said to him, "Paul I have much people in this city. And the reason you are here is in order that you might be my instrument." And the apostle learned the great truth that he was simply an instrument in the hands of God in order that God may accomplish his sovereign purpose. If there's any secret to the apostle's ministry, that is the secret that we should keep before us.

Now there are some things in this passage of incidental interest such as those that touch the charismatic movement because the apostle does mention in verse 19, "Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God." I will say a few things

about that in just a moment. But let's look now at this last section, verse 14 through verse 21, as the apostle expounds the significance of his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles.

He explains to them his purpose in writing in verses 14 and 15. It's, I think, somewhat interesting as one reads the Epistle to the Romans to read the 1st chapter in which after his introduction he speaks of his plans and purposes to visit the Romans and how he was hindered and now having finished the doctrinal portion he writes again of his plans and purposes. It's almost as if he has bracketed the doctrinal section of the epistle by two sections that have to do with his personal plans. Well this is the second as we now draw near the end of the epistle. He says, "Now I am persuaded, I myself also of you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."

Jay Adams has written a book called *Competent to Counsel* which had made a great splash in the evangelical world because it is an attempt to relate Scripture to the psychological process of Christian counseling. And this text, "Able also to admonish one another," is the basis of the title *Competent to Counsel*. Now that raises some questions here. The apostle says, "I am writing for these purposes but I'm writing to you and I want you to know you're full of goodness and you have all knowledge and you're able to counsel one another."

One might say at this point, "Well what's the point of writing to the Romans, Paul, if they are full of goodness and if they have all knowledge and they are able also to counsel one another, then why write them this lengthy theological treatise?" Probably the greatest of all of the epistles, perhaps the greatest book of the New Testament, possibly the greatest in the whole of the Bible, the Epistle to the Romans, written to people who didn't need it."

Well I know that sometimes we think well that's just like a preacher. Isn't that what he's supposed to do, talk about things that we have no need of knowing? Well I'm surprised, sometimes I read commentators and they say yes, that's what Paul meant. They are full of goodness, they have all knowledge, and they're able to admonish one another, and they don't need any theology. And yet the apostle has spent approximately fourteen chapters in giving them some very significant theology.

Now that makes me think that the apostle is not wrong but perhaps his modern commentators are wrong. Because that has been my experience, that Paul leaves his commentators behind very frequently. They write about Paul but they don't really understand him often. Now I think that there is a law of biblical reading and interpretation which everyone knows who's been around the study of the Bible very much at all but which is probably as rarely practiced as any principle in Bible reading. It's simply this, you know it, read the Bible in the light of its context.

Now what is the context of this statement, "I'm persuaded of you, my brethren, that you're full of goodness, and you have all knowledge, and you're able to admonish one another?" What's the context of this? Is it the context of a general theological background? Well no, the apostle is not talking about systematic theology. He's talking about a very specific topic in the preceding section. What shall we do when the strong and the weak differ over the things that we ought to do? For example, can I eat this? Can I drink this? Should I observe this day or that day? The apostle has been speaking about debatable things, morally indifferent things.

So when he says, "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness," the chances are he means the kind of goodness that will constrain the strong, not to despise the weak. And also constrain the weak from condemning the strong. The strong being those who have no scruples, understand their Christian liberty. The weak, those who have inhibitions and scruples and condemn the strong for the exercise of freedom which they think is unjustifiable.

The apostle says, "I am persuaded of you, that you are full of goodness." That is, you'll respond to this exhortation in a proper way and this goodness will constrain the strong from despising and the weak from condemning, and furthermore you have all knowledge. That is, you have experiential knowledge of these questions that I've been discussing, knowledge about these things particularly, and finally that you're able to counsel one another over them, he expresses a confidence in their response to his exhortation concerning morally indifferent things.

He's not saying that you have all knowledge of justification by faith. One of the commentators has said he is saying here that the Romans had all understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith; they had all knowledge of the doctrine of the human flesh and its affects of sin upon it. Even cites Melancthon, the colleague of Luther, who said, "Old Adam is too strong for young Philip." The Romans understood all of this, so he said, they understood the doctrine of justification, they understood the doctrine of sanctification, and they understood the other great doctrines of the faith. And again I say, "Then Paul why did you waste your letter upon them? Why didn't you write it to Believers Chapel in Dallas because they don't have all of that understanding that the Romans evidently had?"

No, Paul is simply saying expressing confidence that they will respond out of what they know to the exhortations that he's been giving to them, now that qualifies his expression of his purpose in writing. But he goes on to say, "Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort," in parts, "as putting you in mind." In other words, "I want to remind you of some things that you have been taught."

Now the reason the apostle said this is because he did not found the church in Rome. Other churches he would have a good idea of the things that they knew because he had been the one who taught them. But in the case of the church at Rome he was not the founder of that church in Rome. That's incidentally the reason why in chapter 16 he mentions so many names because he's heard of all of them and he wants to make contact with them in a personal way.

But nevertheless here he says, "I want to remind you of some things. The church is not from me, I want to go over a few things with you, share a few things with you." So in effect, he's just saying, "I want to remind you of some things."

I read the other day of a man who said that he ran across a man who was an adult man who had a string about his finger to remind him of something that he was supposed to do. I'm sure when I reach the age when I would see a string around my finger to remind me of something that I was supposed to do I would say, "Now I wonder what I was supposed to remind myself that I was to do by that." One of the greatest proofs of fall of man is the fact that he forgets. Now young people never forget. People in middle-age never forget, only old people forget, you know. But that's one of the greatest proofs of the fall of man. And if you have been forgetting a few things from time-to-time that's a sign you're a fallen man. Isn't it strange, we have such a hard time remembering what

we want to remember and we so easily remember the things that we want to forget. That's part of the effect of the fall.

So you Romans, I want to remind you of a few things because, this is the reason for it, the justification for it, "Because of the grace that is given to me of God." Why, you see, he is the apostle to the Gentiles, and the Romans are largely Gentile believers, not entirely, largely Gentile believers. And so he mentions he's the apostle of the Gentiles, he's been given that grace to minister to them and so he wants to remind them. Well what do you want to remind them, Paul? Well he says, "I want to remind you of God's purpose in my ministry, first of all, that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God. That the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable being sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

Now here in clauses, as someone has said, "Full of the language of worship, Paul speaks of the purpose of this grace that was given to him." And when he speaks of it, first of all, he says, "I am the minister of Christ Jesus." Now the word that he uses to express the idea of ministry is not the ordinary word for servant. It's a word that refers to a servant as a liturgical servant. That is, as a servant in religious things. It's certainly suitable for the use of priestly service and in fact in the Old Testament Greek this word was often used of the Levites and others of the priests who ministered in priestly things. So it's almost as if he were saying, "I'm Christ's priest, I'm the minister, I'm the liturgical minister, I'm the religious minister, I'm the priest of Jesus Christ." Now that's a magnificent calling Paul. Yes, it's a magnificent calling.

Notice he says that he's, "The servant of Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is the important person. Hudson Taylor was one of the great missionaries to China, God used him to open up Inland China and ultimately to be the founder of the China Inland Mission. If you've never read anything about Hudson Taylor I suggest you do. Hudson Taylor said, "One day God said to me, 'I'm going to evangelize Inland China, if you will walk with me I will do it through you.'" By the grace of God he was enabled to do that and God opened up Inland China to the ministry of the gospel through Hudson Taylor. The apostle Paul had a similar, although greater, ministry.

He says also, "Ministering the gospel of God." Now that word ministering is a word that means to serve the gospel as a priest. So the apostle is talking about his ministry in priestly metaphors. He's likening himself to a priest who's going about the business of doing the Lord's work, but everything is slightly different because the priests in the Old Testament ministered in the old covenant. He ministers under the new covenant. The old covenant was valid for a time, from the time of Mount Sinai to the time of the cross. Those sacrifices that those priests offered were valid sacrifices. They were designed to cover the guilt and penalty of sin when they were offered in faith. And so as the individuals sin they brought the sacrifices in the expression of their faith. That was an evidence that the faith that they had was a working faith, real faith, a genuine faith, a faith that worked.

And so all of that time, that great cultic system was in force. The Levites, the priests, the high priest, all ministered in that old covenant. And they had that valid ministry. Now the apostle, using the same terminology, speaks of his ministry of the new covenant. The old covenant had a temporary validity. The new covenant has a permanent validity. The old covenant, it really never did take away sin in the ultimate sense. The new covenant is a ministry that provides a permanent forgiveness of sins.

In the case of the Old Testament, the sacrifices that the priest offered were the animals. In the new covenant the great sacrifice, the one great sacrifice, is the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those sacrifices were pleasing to the Lord for a time. This sacrifice is pleasing to him forever. Those were animals without spot and blemish, suggestive of the Lamb of God who is without spot and blemish. Those sacrifices were acceptable because they were in accordance with the word of God, this sacrifice is acceptable because it is the sacrifice of the eternal Son.

Furthermore the offering up of the animals while in the Old Testament was acceptable to God as a typical picture. The offering up now, Paul says, of the Gentiles is something that is possible by the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit who has made holy this offering of the Gentiles.

So Paul speaks, then, in priestly language, speaking of himself as Christ's priest to the Gentiles. Now the priest of the Old Testament offered animals, they met the offerer at the door to the tabernacle and they received the animal from the individual who said, "I've sinned, I need to offer a sin offering." The priest took the offering, he took it over to the altar of brazen sacrifice and he slew the animal. And the benefits of all of that was reckoned to the individual who had brought them. The apostle speaks of himself here as a priest but he is offering up the Gentiles. So he speaks of himself as a new covenant minister preaching the gospel, the gospel being the new covenant ministry, the promise of the forgiveness of sins through faith and the Lord Jesus Christ and those who respond are his offering. And so he's offering up not an animal but he's offering up individuals, Gentiles, to God who have been responsive by the work of the Holy Spirit to the gospel, have been cleansed of their guilt and penalty of sin, have received the forgiveness of sins and justification of life, having been set apart by the Holy Spirit, made acceptable by the Holy Spirit who has created in them that holy position that renders them acceptable as an offering to the Lord. It's a magnificent conception of his ministry, that's what he says he is. He is a priest of Jesus Christ who is serving the gospel as a priest with reference to the Gentiles that he may offer up to God the Gentiles as an offering sanctified by the Holy Spirit who has in his converting, regenerating work brought them to the forgiveness of sins.

"Therefore," the eventuation of this is, "therefore," verse 17, "I have that of which I may glory in Jesus Christ in those things that pertain to God." So he glories only in Jesus Christ, incidentally that's of course the only way in which we can glory as an individual servant of the Lord. He glories only in Jesus Christ and only in those things that pertain to God. "I have a right," he says, "to glory in Jesus Christ and in the things that pertain to God." Those two things limit his glory.

What do you mean Paul? Well he explains, "For," verse 18, "I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought through me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed." Man is made to glorify God and if we are made to glorify God it is clear that the only principle upon which God may bless us is the principle of grace. The principle of grace guarantees that God will be glorified in what is done. That's why the principle of grace is fundamental to God's dealings with men.

I had someone the other day give me one of the greatest compliments I think I have ever received. I don't think they realized how great it was. I did. This person said, "The thing that I have appreciated about the study in the Epistle to the Romans has been

the stress that you have given to the doctrine of the grace of God." Well that's what I want you to appreciate because that is the apostolic principle, the principle of grace.

Now he says, "I would not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me." He says, "I wouldn't dare speak of things that have not been wrought by Christ, I want to speak," this is a negative way of saying the positive. "I want to speak of the things that Jesus Christ has done through me." And incidentally he does not say, "I want to speak of the things I have wrought through Christ." But the emphasis rests upon Christ even more than that statement, although that statement's permissible, it's, "What Christ has wrought through me." And in the Greek text that's what the stress rests upon, upon, "What Christ has wrought through me." So the apostle is stressing very strongly what Christ has done is the significant thing.

Now modern ministry is quite a bit different. Modern ministry would like us to think that we are important to God. Well in one sense we are the objects of the love of God but we are important only because of what he does for us and to us. I was reading a commentator, who was a former student of mine, this past week and he said, "Not a week goes by but half a dozen posters and pamphlets cross my desk promoting the work of some man, tell me how much he has done for God." Incidentally, I received one just recently from a church in this area in which they were promoting the work of a particular man who would come to their church. He says, "I've learned to throw most of them into the waste basket unopened." But you never hear Paul telling how much he has done for God. Everywhere it's God has done, "Through him." And that's the secret of a truly effective life.

One of the reasons in why in the Christian church we have such great emphasis on numbers is this same principle. We want to keep some of the glory for ourselves. He said, "Recently a young man asked him why did God punish King David for numbering Israel?" That's one of the puzzles of the Old Testament. Why did God severely punish the king and his people when he took a census of Israel? That doesn't sound like a very serious crime, does it? There's hardly a church that we go in that doesn't have some comment concerning numbers. How many people we had last week? How many people we have this week? How many people we ought to have next week?

I preach in a lot of different churches and very frequently in the main auditorium there'll be a little something over on the side of the wall, it's not here by the way, attendance last Sunday, attendance today, attendance Sunday school. And you can see how the ministry is getting along, how God is doing week by week, if you just watch those figures up there [Laughter].

He goes on to say, "It represented David's departure from the principle of dependence upon God to be his resource and shift to the world's resources of numbers. Nothing has contributed more to the weakness of the church than this dependence up on numbers as though a great crowd of people can do something." Always reminds me of Martyn Lloyd-Jones's statement concerning the ecumenical movement, "Undergirding which is this desire to be united in order to make a more impressive mark on the world. But unfortunately not uniting in the truth of Holy Scripture." He said, "Throwing all of the ecclesiastical corpses into the same grave will not bring about a resurrection." [Laughter] Numbers do not really mean anything. The important thing is God doing something through men. But it's Christ working that is important.

Now he says, "Through mighty signs and wonders." And we say, "Ah, there is the secret of the apostle's ministry, he had a charismatic ministry. And if we had a charismatic ministry then we would be blessed too. We would have fire in our meetings and we'd have some icicles up and down our spines if we spoke in tongues, if we had helix, if we had this kind of thing and that kind of thing."

What does Paul mean when he says, "Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God." Well, he certainly does not mean what is commonly meant today by gifts of miracles and signs and wonders as they are carried on today. Just this past week in our newspapers we have had again great publicity given to a so-called miraculous healing. Now let me say I am not against the idea that God heals. He does heal. We're talking about the gift of healing, that's what we're talking about. God does heal in answer to prayer. He doesn't heal in supernatural fashions. Very often it would appear from human experience today, but nevertheless he does. It is not impossible. It's not impossible that it is a genuine, divine healing. But divine healing as a gift is something else.

The apostles attribute this to ministry of the apostle in the apostolic age. In 2 Corinthians the apostle writes, in the 12th chapter, and in the 12th verse, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." He uses much the same language that he uses here. The signs and wonders were the things that accompanied the preaching of the apostles, they were characteristic of the apostolic age. They have faded out of significance and for centuries no one even claimed that they existed until relatively recent times.

So when we read here of mighty signs and wonders we are not to understand from this the kinds of things that are claimed for so-called charismatic ministry today. We have charismatic ministry in Believers Chapel in that all of us have been given spiritual gifts by God. But these mighty signs and wonders they were characteristic of the apostolic age. It does not mean since they did it that we are to do it. The fact that Moses was able by the grace of God to be the instrumentality for the opening up of the Red Sea does not mean that we are able to stand by today and do the same thing and open the Red Sea and we're not obedient if we are not able to do it. That's just simply a failure to understand the word of God.

In Romans chapter 12 I made reference to prophecy and said in the course of the message that prophecy was a gift that is not being exercised today. Well in Nashville, Tennessee the radio ministry there is following rather closely to us here in Dallas and so they've already had that message up there and I've already had a reply from a very nice man who wrote a very kind letter to me, and I appreciate this letter, in which he said that he does believe that God still speaks. Well of course I believe that God still speaks, too, through his word. He says that he respected my right to pursue an intellectual interpretation of the Scriptures, I appreciate that, but it is only by faith and the spirit of the Holy One that we can hope to understand the true reality of our creator and his continuous guidance for our lives. Well I appreciate that, too, and believe that we do have continuous guidance in our lives through the Holy Spirit. So in humility he submitted to me about eight pages of prophecy, but so far as prophecy is concerned I must say if this is prophecy it certainly is a banal thing, insipid, and flat, and contributes nothing that is not found already in Holy Scriptures. There is a weaving together of some

words from Holy Scripture but it does not say anything. I'm still looking for a significant prophecy.

Back in June, about June 28 or so, the Lord Jesus was supposed to come again. And one of the prophets, Bill Maupin, had prophesied that he would come. Well now, when the day drew near he began to weaken a bit and said that in the light of the fact that his figures might not be exactly right it might not be on the particular day but since there was a time difference between our time and the Eastern time it might be any time from twelve o'clock on one day to twelve o'clock on another day. Well of course that was the great prophetic fizzle of 1981. The rapture fizzled and he did not come.

Now what is the result of all of this? Well the result of all of this is the reproach of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If that prophecy, so-called, had never been made the Christian faith would not be regarded as it presently is. That is, it would have, it has had, a contributing part in the reproach that people bring on the gospel of Christ. Because we do have some weirdoes in the church of God. They are truly believers, but they're just weirdoes [Laughter]. And what they need to do is, in my opinion, is study more earnestly the Holy Scriptures and pay attention to what the apostle says. He associates the mighty signs and miracles and wonders with his ministry as an apostle in confirming that message that he was giving in his day.

He goes on to say in verse 19 that he has fully preached the gospel from Jerusalem roundabout to Illyricum. That is, he has given a representative ministry all the way around the whole circle to what is now present day Yugoslavia or Albania. Not preaching to every individual, but he's completed the design of the work that God had for him. He will now go on and tell us he wants to go west.

He says in verse 20 and 21 some things that have to do with his principle of ministry. He says, "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel." That word translated strived in the Authorized Version is a word that means to have as one's ambition, to aspire. Three times it's used in the New Testament. One time Paul says, "I have as an ambition that we be quiet, that we study to be quiet. Then I have an ambition to stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and be judged, be acceptable to him in the judgment that I as a Christian must undergo." Here he says, "I have as my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named." This does not mean that this is to be a policy for us, this is the apostolic policy, this is Paul's policy. He did not enter into the territory where others had been ministering as in Galatians. They decided in Jerusalem that he would go to the Gentiles, that Peter and others would go to the circumcision, to the Jews. So Paul's principles of ministry was to go where Christ had not been named. His aim was to found new churches in the Gentile area. That's what he's talking about.

And so he says, "I have as my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." It's all right to build on another man's foundation if you have the leadership of the Holy Spirit in that. But his leadership was to preach the gospel where Christ was not named to spread the testimony to Christ by founding churches all over the Gentile world. And he attributes his ministry and the principle of it to an Old Testament text finding in it an analogy, "Yet but as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand." A reference to the response of Gentiles to the ministry of the servant of the Lord in the future, but he finds an illustration of this in his present ministry to the Gentiles.

Well let me close by doing just this, I'd like to call attention very quickly to two things. First the worker is an instrument and not an agent. Alfred Lord Tennyson said, "Our wills are ours, to make them Thine." We are an instrument. We are not an agent. We are an instrument in the hands of a sovereign God. Christ, Christ through me is the emphasis of the apostle. I think of Joshua, one of the great servants of God. He was out before Jericho, reconnoitering before they went in to take the city, he saw a man over against him, the Bible says, with a sword drawn in his hand. He went up to this man and he said, "Art thou for us, or against us?" And this man said, "I'm neither for you nor against you, but as the captain of the Lord's hosts have I come." And there was something in that man's eyes that so impressed Joshua that he fell down upon his feet before him because it was holy ground, it was the Son of God in one of his pre-incarnate appearances. And Joshua, General Joshua, learned this, he wasn't General Joshua, he was Lieutenant General Joshua and this individual was the true captain of the Lord's hosts who had come to take over.

And in the Lord's work we are not agents, we are instruments. It is he that is the general, we are the prophets. He not simply assists us he takes charge. And he moves sovereignly, moving us to obedience and then to service for the glory of God, that in the end he may be glorified and not simply God plus me.

Now Paul says as a wise master builder he laid the foundation upon which others build. What is a wise master builder? Well Paul had a plan or he had a go, it's evident. First plan your work then work your plan, someone has said, Paul had it. When we do what God tells us to do we may expect results and the apostle had results. But we should distinguish having results from seeing results. We may not always see the results that we have, that's evidenced by the ministry that Believers Chapel has over the radio. We don't, I don't, see the ministry, the results we have, but the letters that come in and the people that I talk to will often tell me, "Well, we have received blessing, we do know people who have come to faith in Christ, we get those indications that God is giving us results."

And finally, well you notice the apostle's dedication to it. The apostle knew the difference between having Christ as prominent in one's life and having Christ as preeminent in one's life. Jesus Christ was everything to the Apostle Paul.

May I close with just this brief story? Because I think it illustrates the importance of the dedication to the Lord. John Clifford was a very outstanding preacher of a generation or two ago. He came to the United States of America, he was a nonconformist leader in England, and he told about an experience that he had in an English university much earlier in his life. He said a missionary from India came to this famous English university, he did not name which one whether it was Cambridge or Oxford, but this man came asking for volunteers. He said he was a missionary in India, he wanted six men to go with him back to India, some to teach, some to be doctors, some to preach. And he reminded them that out there they would find every convenience of the home land: golf courses, swimming pools, and nice homes. And the men of the university gave him an icy stare. He said shortly afterwards there came a man from Persia. He was barely forty years of age but he said his hair was as white as snow. And he said this to the men, he said, "I want six men to go back with me to Persia." He said, "I'm nearly to the end of my life, I'll not live out my days and I don't promise you that you will live out even half of your days. You'll have an early death and you'll be in your graves early too, but for Christ's sake who gave himself for us, who will be willing to go and serve him there?"

And Mr. Clifford said six stalwart young men came forward and enlisted for the work of the Lord in Persia.

We do need a rebirth of the kind of passion that puts Jesus Christ first. That recognizes that he is the sovereign God carrying out his purpose and he will carry it out. If we resist he will carry it out through someone else. But he will carry out his ministry and may God give us the desire to be one of his instruments. If you are here and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ we invite you to come to him who alone gives the forgiveness of sins. This new covenant ministry that we have the privilege of proclaiming offers an eternal forgiveness of sins. Come to Christ. Lean upon him and upon him alone and receive forgiveness of sins.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the privilege that is ours to be a servant of the sovereign God, how glorious. If there are some here who do not know the Son of God, O God in wonderful grace bring them to themselves and to him.

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]