

Sermons through

Romans

The Offering of the Gentiles

Romans 15:14-16

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
8/20/2017*

The Offering of the Gentiles

Romans 15:14-16

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 (Romans 15:14-16).

Introduction

Years ago, I was standing with a friend in his front yard when a little girl of about three-years approached us holding a doll. Apparently, a neighbor's child, she said "Look at my dolly!" My friend said nothing to her. I don't remember what I said. When she walked away he uttered the words, "So materialistic! That really turns me off!" I was a bit uncomfortable with that response.

It should be no surprise to any Christian that Scriptures teach that all men are sinful. It can easily be argued that the more we understand the depth of our sin the more we understand the height of God's grace. Jesus was not unclear that He did "**not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance**" (Matthew 9:13). The gospel is tailor-made for sinners.

The technical/theological term for this is Total Depravity. Total Depravity does not mean we are depraved (or sinful, corrupted) in an abject sense. We haven't hit the bottom of the barrel. We can all be worse than we are. Total does not refer to depth but scope. That is to say that sin has so affected me that there is nothing about any part of me (my will, my ethics, my fortitude, my virtue, etc.) that seeks after God. Sin has utterly incapacitated my ability to even begin a work of redemption in my own life in any respect.

Total Depravity is an important and valuable doctrine. Even as a believer the Apostle Paul recognized the power and presence of sin in his life, referring to himself as a "**wretched man**" engulfed as it were in a

“body of death” and in need of deliverance-a deliverance found in Christ (Romans 7:24, 25).

At the same time, the Scriptures speak of good people. Jesus referred to Nathanael as an Israelite in whom there was no **“guile”** or **“deceit”** (John 1:47). Job is referred to a **“blameless and upright”** man (Job 1:1). It is not a Reformed nor biblical doctrine to state that there are no good people in any sense. Truly, before God no one is good. The same man, Job, who was declared **“blameless and upright”**, when having a personal audience with God abhorred (cast away, melt away) himself and repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:6).

We have two different relationships in view here. No man will stand upon his own goodness before God. But that is not to say that there is no goodness or knowledge in any sense, especially among believers. We can encourage three-year-olds in their enjoyment of their dollies. Paul observes:

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 (Romans 15:14).

We see in this verse very affirming words. The Christians in Rome were full of **“goodness”** and **“knowledge”** -two necessary attributes which must accompany the call to **“admonish one another.”** What do these words mean and what are we to do with them?

Goodness

Goodness *agathosynes* carries the idea of being morally honorable and pleasing to God, and therefore beneficial. Beneficence would be a synonym. Goodness is not inwardly focused or static. If a person is good they are living a life pleasing to God and of benefit to others. There is an undeniable call for Christians to pursue this virtue in their relationships with everyone. Our lives are to be a treasure box to our neighbors. But the Apostle lays special emphasis on this interaction within the body of Christ.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

Church is not to be thought of as a singular event during the course of our week. It is an interdependent family-a covenant community. And we stand in need of one another's close, interactive and personal goodness.

Knowledge

The other highlighted attribute is that of knowledge *gnoseos*. It simply means to know what you're talking about. We live in a world of people who think they know what they're talking about, or at least they're good at convincing others. And I must say that when I perceive that someone actually does know what they're talking about (no matter what the topic) I find it to be engaging, enjoyable and beneficial.

One of our former elders was amazingly knowledgeable on a variety of issues-photography, guns, satellites, metallurgy, not to mention theology. Every time he would open his mouth we would sit astonished at his depth. He was like a walking documentary.

At the same time, some of my most horrifying moments were when it hit me in the midst of a dialogue, that I didn't really know what I was talking about. This may not be terribly self-incriminating but I recall many years ago correcting a person on how to pronounce the name of a street. The street was spelt Y-N-E-Z. He pronounced it y-nezz. I corrected him and said it was pronounced i-nezz. A third person, who could actually speak Spanish interjected, "it's pronounced ee-nezz." The first person made an honest mistake. The third person knew what she was talking about. I was the dangerous person. A street name error is pretty minor. But a person in power and authority who doesn't truly know what he/she is talking about, and is unwilling to admit it, provides a landscape where the consequences can be devastating.

It is an epidemic in our culture-especially in theology and ethics. So many don't know what they're talking about. So many have strong opinions but no justification for those opinions. How have you arrived at that opinion and why does it carry any authority? These things (how you know what you know and why it carries legitimate authority) remain well-

hidden in most people. But as Christians, we of all people should know what we believe, where that knowledge comes from and why it is valid.

In his desire to see the church full of assurance, understanding, knowledge and unity- **“knit together in love”** Paul writes of Christ...

...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

Because of the fall-because of sin, this wisdom and knowledge is, so to speak, hidden from us but it is found in Christ. But one last word of caution. It is not uncommon for people to appeal to a sort of caricature of Christ as their source. I can't tell you how often I have heard people say, "I don't think Jesus would do this or that" in stark contradiction to what the Scriptures say about Jesus.

We unearth that wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ through the spadework of Bible study.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

This is seen in the exhortations of Jesus Himself, in the many times He uttered the words, **“Have you not read”** (Matthew 12:3, 3; 19:4; 22:31; Mark 12:26).

Admonish

It is armed with goodness and knowledge that we find ourselves **“able”** *dynamenoi* to **“admonish”** *nouthetein* one another. To admonish means to counsel others to avoid or cease engaging in a sinful course. There are numerous issues we can discuss when speaking of this. I'll mention but a few:

First, as the context states, these warnings or admonitions must be according to sound knowledge. We need to be able to distinguish between that which I subjectively find unattractive and that which is objectively wrong. Whether it is the kind of songs we sing, books we read, food we

eat, beverages we drink, clothing we wear, etc., it can be quite difficult to arrive at warranted and certain conclusions.

Sometimes I'll visit other churches and genuinely struggle with the type of music used in worship. There are songs in our own church that I strongly prefer over other songs. But then I'll hear my children singing my less preferred songs around the house. It forces me to recognize my own subjectivity. Of course, there are some songs that can be outright heretical. Determining whether or not something is heretical is not a matter of taste or passion. It is a matter of knowledge. The facts need to be known and the conclusion must be based upon sound biblical principles.

Second, as the context also states, our admonitions must come from the goodness of our hearts. Admonishing someone must not be a source of catharsis. We should not engage in an effort to purge our own frustrations. Godly admonitions are not done with a full head of steam. Nor should it proceed from a desire to have power or control over others. An admonition is to be done for the benefit of the one being admonished.

Finally, it requires courage. It is not a fun activity. Be prepared that no matter how accurate you might be in terms of knowledge and how convinced you are that your words are flowing from the goodness of your heart, it may not be well-received. Be prepared to be accused-accused of being judgmental, selfish, impatient.

"Fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7b). When on the receiving end of an admonition, let us make every effort to avoid being a fool. Let us remember,

Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful (Proverbs 27:6).

We must decide who we're going to be in all of this. Will we despise wisdom and instruction? Will we be the faithful friend? Do we know the kisses of an enemy when we feel them? We are called to help one another in all these matters. These are things we are able to do and should be doing. Yet it is followed by a **"nevertheless"** or **"but"** *de* in the next verse.

Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God (Romans 15:15).

I Have Written

Yet even the Spirit given graces of goodness and knowledge fall short. The written word-God's word is necessary. We forget. God has graciously provided the written word, rather than relying merely upon tradition, due to our tendency to forget. Our confession says it nicely. Speaking of the Scriptures, it states:

Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manner, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; (Heb. 1:1) and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: (Prov. 22:19-21, Luke 1:3-4, Rom. 15:4, Matt. 4:4,7,10, Isa. 8:19-20) which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; (2 Tim. 3:15, 2 Pet. 1:19) those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased. (Heb. 1:1-2)¹

We don't merely to forget, but to ignore and even twist those things which must boldly be said. The actual first word in the sentence in Greek is "**boldly**" *tolmeroteron*. The Scriptures will often carry an uncomfortable yet necessary forcefulness.

The Apostle appeals to the grace of God given to him, specifically as it related to his ministerial service to the gentiles.

...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 (Romans 15:16).

The Offering of the Gentiles

As you know, prior to the birth of Christ, God's gracious interaction with humanity revolved primarily around Israel. The kingdom of God

¹ WCF, 1:1b

would begin its growth, according to Jesus (and the OT as well), like a small seed. That small seed was Christ Himself, born (as we read in Daniel) during the Roman Empire. Humanity was to look for its hope coming from Bethlehem-from Israel.

At the birth of Christ, the history of redemption took a universal and international turn. One would think this would yield a natural excitement—a joy! Yet cultures collided in the early church and a large part of Paul’s ministry was seeking to persuade Christians that they weren’t merely one with God but one with each other. **“one new man”** *hena kainon anthropon* as he wrote (Ephesians 2:15). The Gentiles (those who were not Jewish-recognizing that Jesus and all the first Christians were Jews) were considered, by many, unwelcomed guests in the kingdom of God. Paul set his sights on ministering to these outcasts who wandered in from the highways and byways.

But what is meant by **“the offering of the Gentiles”**?² The deeper I looked at this verse the more I became convinced that the proper understanding and application of this verse provided the answer to every conceivable conflict. Whether it be difficult marriages, strife in the workplace or national discord or international disputes and clashes, this verse provides the answer.

The verse doesn’t merely provide an answer to man’s conflict with man, but an **“acceptable, sanctified”** offering of the **“Gentiles-nations”** provides an answer to man’s conflict with God as well.

The **“offering of the gentiles”** is not a religious practice where they, similar to the OT priest, offer animals or even some acceptable liturgy or religious practice designed to remit our sins. The picture here appears to be the Apostle, as the **“minister”** serving as a priest **“ministering”** *hierougounta*. But what does this priest have to offer? What is the **“offering”** *prosphora*? It is something seldom heard in the church today. The offering of the gentiles are the gentiles themselves.

Here, similar to Romans 12:1, we see the call to (in light of God’s mercy-not to obtain God’s mercy) **“present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.”** Jesus offered up His life for us, truly, meritoriously, satisfactorily, entirely. Those who have called upon the name of the Lord have souls purified by faith-souls that are holy and

² It would appear that Paul views this as a fulfillment of Isaiah 66 (as well as many other OT passages which anticipate the international nature of the gospel).

acceptable to God-souls which are to be offered up to God in praise, thanksgiving and sacrificial obedience.

So many people throughout history have been willing to give their lives-offer their lives-in service to a person or a cause. Every person, in one way or another, is laying their life on the altar of something or someone. What is your theme? Who is your master? How has he/she/it called you to serve? And what has this master done for you? What are the credentials of this master and why does it deserve your allegiance?

The Christian has a Master who, prior to becoming our Master, was our Servant. He came to serve and lay down His life to lavish upon us the riches of heaven and the wisdom of how life should be lived every day. And a disposition we are to seek to cultivate in our own hearts is one of being an offering. We see no labor in Paul's writing when he identifies as one who is being **"poured out as a drink offering"** (**Philippians 2:17; 2 Timothy 4:6**). On the contrary, he rejoices and is glad.

One wonders how often the contemporary pastor views his charge in this manner (I find it difficult myself)-to see his congregation and the purpose of his preaching, to offer up to God a people cleansed by the blood of Christ-a bride prepared for her groom, offering themselves in sacrifice and service to God and to one another?

One can barely imagine the beauty of a church (of a world) that embraced the notion that we are purified souls whose chief aim is to glorify God by sacrificially loving and serving the One from whom all truth, wisdom and blessings flow.

Questions for Study

1. What is Total Depravity and why is it important to understand (pages 2, 3)?
2. Does Total Depravity mean people are as evil as they could possibly be? Explain (pages 2, 3).
3. What does it mean to be good? What is necessarily attached to goodness (pages 3, 4)?
4. Why is knowledge important? How have you arrived at the things you know and why do you think it's valid (pages 4, 5)?
5. How does one unearth the treasures hidden in Christ (page 5)?
6. What does it mean to admonish someone and what are some issues which accompany the task of admonishing others (pages 5, 6)?
7. Is the knowledge and goodness found in Christians sufficient or is more needed for the church preserve and propagate the truth (pages 6, 7)?
8. What is meant by the "offering of the Gentiles" and how can you apply that to you daily life (pages 7-9)?

