

**WHERE WE GO FROM HERE**  
**ROMANS 15:14-16**

What verse or passage of Scripture is most meaningful in your life? What verse has changed your life?

There have been multiple verses that I have repeatedly referenced and found helpful: **Jn. 14:27**; **Ps. 19:14**; Eph. 5:25ff; 1 Pt. 3:7. And more. What are your “influential verses?”

Among verses that have changed us, there are a few verses that have also changed the course of Christian history and the church. **Romans 1:16-17** is one of those; consider how it changed Martin Luther’s life:

“I hated that word ‘righteousness of God,’ which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically of the formal or active justice, as they called it, by which God is righteous and punishes sinners and the unrighteous. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt I was a sinner before God with a most disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, indeed, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. Secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant....

“I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith....Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of all Scripture showed itself to me. And whereas before ‘the righteousness of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.” [Martin Luther]

The verse in front of us this morning is one of those as well; the Lord saw fit to use Romans 15:14 to change one man’s life and perspective of ministry and thus change the trajectory of thousands of people and hundreds of churches, of which we are one. Romans 15:14 transformed the life of Jay Adams and has subsequently transformed the way we at GBC think about and do ministry.

In Romans 15:14, Paul begins the conclusion of his letter. This is the most intimate and private part of the letter; in this section he begins to speak much more personally — we hear his personal heart and desires for ministry/missions and his love for the Romans (even though he hasn’t met them yet).

This section is primarily about his upcoming travel plans, especially starting in v. 22, while chapter 16 contains his personal greetings and final benediction. As he transitions to his ministry plans, it gets him thinking about what constitutes effective ministry and he wants to provide the Romans with an exhortation to be active in engaging in ministry for the Lord — and to provide an encouragement for what he already sees in their ministry in Rome. We can summarize these three verses this way:

**BE CONFIDENT IN GOD’S PROVISION TO USE YOU TO SERVE HIS PEOPLE.**

In this passage, Paul essentially is providing an answer to a question something like, “Ok — we understand these theological truths (chs. 1-11) and how those truths work in the church and relationships (chs. 12-15), but what do we do with those truths? Where do we go from here?”

Where we go is to service. Where we go is the spiritual care of souls. Where we go is being poured out in guiding and shepherding each other — to help each other live more faithfully for Christ. In these verses, Paul provides both an exhortation to serve and an example of service.

**1. The EXHORTATION to Serve Christ’s People (vv. 14-15a)**

- ✓ To serve Christ’s people, be filled with His GOODNESS (v. 14a)
- ✓ To serve Christ’s people, be filled with His KNOWLEDGE (v. 14b)
- ✓ To serve Christ’s people, admonish with His WISDOM (v. 14c)

**2. Paul, an EXAMPLE of Serving Christ’s People (vv. 15-16)**

- ✓ His work for Christ was a GIFT from Christ (v. 15)
- ✓ His work for Christ was an act of WORSHIP (v. 16a)
- ✓ His work for Christ was by the Holy Spirit’s POWER (v. 16b)

## 1. The EXHORTATION to Serve Christ's People (vv. 14)

### • To serve Christ's people, be filled with His GOODNESS (v. 14a)

- ✓ The Spirit of God produces His fruit in people, transforming them so that they don't sin and they do acts of righteous obedience to Christ — that's all of chapter eight, but especially 8:3-4, 11-13, 23.
- ✓ That transforming work of sanctification is not instantaneous, but progressive. And sometimes it can feel slow — “Will I ever change? Will I ever consistently not sin with this sin?”
- ✓ But sometimes, there is real, noticeable change — and that is what Paul commends in the Romans: **Concerning you...I am convinced...** They were obviously living under the power of the Spirit.
  - Some commentators suggest that Paul is using a form of flattery with the Romans as a kind of manipulation to get them to do what he wants them to do.
  - That's disingenuous. That's not how Paul operates. He frequently commends people for their maturity and evidence of faith — cf. 1 Cor. 1:4-8; Phil. 1:3-7; Col. 1:3-8. In fact, he made a similar statement to this verse at the beginning of this letter: 1:8.
  - Paul is *convinced* of their character — He is confident about them. Of what is he confident?
- ✓ He is confident that they are **full of goodness**.
  - To say that they are “full” of goodness is to say that goodness is pervasive in their lives — just as unrighteousness is pervasive in the lives of the ungodly (1:29). They are “outstandingly good.”
  - This pervasive **goodness** is not the imputed goodness or righteousness of Christ (though we also have that); it is the moral and ethical goodness that is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:29). It is not just that these Romans are “good,” but that they do good toward others.
  - They are generous, kind, and benevolent. “He's a good brother,” “she is a good person...”
- ✓ In spite of the lengthy admonition about relationships between the weak and the strong (14:1ff), Paul is affirming that the Roman church is doing well. The people in the church are demonstrating the goodness of Christ toward one another. They are kind, and known for their love.
- ✓ The goodness of the Romans was not something unusual. It is the typical work of the Spirit in the life of every believer (Gal. 5:22). It is the kind of attribute for which we should also be known.

### • To serve Christ's people, be filled with His KNOWLEDGE (v. 14b)

- ✓ Paul is also convinced that the Romans are **filled with all knowledge**.
- ✓ They have been filled (by the Spirit) and are continuing to be filled with knowledge. That is, they are submissive to what the Spirit is producing in them. They are controlled by what they know.
- ✓ Specifically, they are filled with **all knowledge**. That doesn't mean that they “know everything.” But it does mean that they have a comprehensive knowledge of the spiritual life.

- ✓ They are a well-taught church, and have been (and are) committed to doing what they know (6:17).
- ✓ To be filled with knowledge doesn't mean that they have lots of information only; it means that there is much comprehension, and they also *act* on what they know. Paul commends the Thessalonians similarly (1 Thess. 2:13) and commands the Colossians (3:16). This was one of Christ's commendations of the disciples (Jn. 17:6 — "they have kept Your word").
- ✓ There is also an implied idea with this phrase — know His Word because when we have Scripture we have everything we need to live the spiritual life.
  - The Bible doesn't provide answers to every particular situation in life (there is no information about removing bugs from our computers, fixing our cars, or how to invest our money).
  - But the Bible does provide every answer for how I should live and respond in every situation — how I should talk to computer help desk, how I should think about broken cars, and what my motives should be in investing my money — and more.
  - The Bible is adequate to help us live with goodness in every circumstance (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It provides the knowledge for everything we need to be godly in every circumstance (2 Pt. 1:3).
- ✓ As we think about ministry and helping one another we do well to ask, "what do I know?" and "what do I do about what I know?" We understand that because of our fleshliness (humanity), there will always be a gap between what we know and do. But what is our pursuit? Do we desire to increase our knowledge, and do we seek more knowledge so that we can live more righteously?

- To serve Christ's people, admonish with His WISDOM (v. 14c)

- ✓ He is also confident that the Romans are **able also to admonish one another**.
- ✓ The word "admonish" has a range of meaning: it includes teaching, but also has the sense of exhortation. But it often moves beyond exhorting to correction, rebuke, and warning. It is a kind of correction that moves someone from false living to true living. It's actually the word *noutheteō*, from which the word "nouthetic" was coined — to refer to biblical counsel and warning.
- ✓ Someone has said that this word is "brotherly," but it is "big-brotherly." [Hiebert] It's the big brother who is telling his younger brother, "Hey, bro, that's going to get you into trouble; let me show you what to do..." This person is not afraid to speak into another's life. Aren't you thankful?
- ✓ Paul also observes that they do this for **one another**. All of them have this capacity and all of them are "taking turns" helping each other — "sometimes you help me; sometimes I help you."
  - There is mutual care for one another, and mutual dependence on one another
  - This reminds us of the necessity of every believer (12:4-5ff).
  - We believe in "every member ministry" (core value). The church only functions well when every member is engaged and using his/her gifts to serve Christ.
- ✓ Notice also that Paul says they are **able** to do this — they have a capacity to counsel and exhort each other. On what basis are they equipped to help? They can help because they are "good" and "they have all knowledge..." They are *morally equipped* and *biblically prepared* to care for one another.

- That they are *able* to counsel one another reminds us that every believer has a Spirit-given ability to serve in the body. We *need* to serve in the body, and we are *able* to serve in the body.
  - Ministry is not for “professionals.” (In fact, even the “professionals” aren’t “professionals” — vocational ministry is not a “job;” it is a calling and a privilege.) Ministry is for everyone. The ability to disciple, counsel, and equip is part of every believer’s calling and responsibility. Some people may be more effective because of gifting, but we are all called and equipped to help.
- ✓ This is the clause that transformed Jay Adams’ ministry (and ours). He said:

“Paul recognized that any Christian may engage in nouthetic counseling, so long as he possesses the qualities of goodness and knowledge....any Christian worker may become a helpful counselor in the place where God has called him to serve.” [*Competent to Counsel*.]

- ✓ Similarly, John MacArthur has written —

“[Paul’s] point in 15:14c is that, through His Word and His Holy Spirit, God had provided the church at Rome — and will provide every godly congregation of believers — with everything needed to live faithfully, effectively, and joyfully for Him. His specific point is that, apart from particular gifts of the Spirit, all faithful Christians are divinely equipped to admonish one another as needs and opportunities arise among them. The Romans had set an example for others in this...”

- While Paul says in this verse that he is confident that these things exist in the Romans, this also gives us a model for what we should be cultivating in ourselves if we want to care for people — and the church.
- **Three implications:** These are the spiritual requirements of what we need if we are going to continue to be effective in training, discipling, and counseling God’s people.
  - ✓ ***If we want people who are good followers of Christ, it requires “good” people to lead them.*** You can’t be unkind, mean, belligerent, bad, and evil and produce good disciples.
  - ✓ ***If we want people to be knowledgeable followers of Christ, then we need to be knowledgeable.*** You can’t lead people where you haven’t gone; you can’t teach what you don’t know. If we are going to help people live by the Book, then you and I need to know the Book. (CBCD Conference)
  - ✓ ***If we want people to be corrected, challenged, and counseled, then we will need to be intentional about cultivating those relationships.*** It has been said that no one is accidentally holy. And it is also true that no one is accidentally disciplined. If we will continue to be serious about our calling to equip and train people to walk with Christ, then we will be purposeful in discipling:
    - *We will intentionally look and listen for people who are struggling.* If you are growing in maturity it is because others have poured into your life. Into whom are you pouring your life (2 Tim. 2:2)? We need multi-generational relationships (people in front, beside, and behind).
    - *We will have intentional conversations.* I’m okay with small talk; that can convey love and care. But we need intentional talk — purposeful questions and direction when we see others in need.

- Are we using “ordinary” conversations for spiritual purposes? When we have relationships, we will have *opportunity* (and responsibility) to help others. When we have and know the Word, we will have the *ability* (and privilege) to help others.

## 2. Paul, an EXAMPLE of Serving Christ’s People (vv. 15-16)

- What Paul was commending the Romans for doing (and subtly encouraging them to continue to do) was the very thing he also was doing in all his ministry —

### • His work for Christ was a GIFT from Christ (v. 15)

- ✓ He acknowledges *I have written very boldly on some points*... He has written daringly!
  - He is not talking about v. 14 or even 14:1 – 15:13 (though that might be included).
  - He is talking about the boldness of some of the earlier things in the letter. It could be anything in the letter to which we say, “Wow, Paul, that’s pretty strong...” Certainly 1:20-32, and confrontation of the Judaizers (2:3ff) or the *may it never be* passages (3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1). These are the “in your kitchen” passages that are strong and confrontational.
  - He is not apologizing or backing away from those passages, but telling us why he wrote them.
- ✓ His point is that he has done the work of nouthetic counseling — he has exhorted and warned. He has done what he has commended (and compelled) the Romans for doing.
- ✓ Why has Paul written boldly? Because he had *a grace that was given me from God*. He had received a gift from God as an apostle (1:1ff) to the task of ministry (v. 16a). And if God had given him the gift, then how could he leave it unused? God has called him to the task, so he will do it.
- ✓ We haven’t been called as apostles; but we have been called to mutually warn, counsel, and help one another in the spiritual life. Like Paul, God has given us a ministry gift. Do we use it as a gift?

### • His work for Christ was an act of WORSHIP (v. 16a)

- ✓ Paul uses three “worship” words in v. 16 —
  - *Minister* is a word that is often used about corporate worship and formal ministry in the corporate church body (e.g., Heb. 8:2). This “ministry” is his taking the gospel *to the Gentiles* — what he is doing in his evangelistic and missionary ventures (vv. 22ff) he sees as acts of worship. They are not just “work” or “service,” but “consecrated worship.” He is doing missions and evangelism from his devotion to Christ.
  - *Ministering as a priest* is an obvious worship image — he is not claiming to be a priest, but he is asserting that his missionary and gospel work is as “worshipful” as the priest’s in the Temple. He is suggesting the imagery that Peter would use in 1 Pt. 2:9. We serve God like priests did.

- **Offering** also has an OT corporate worship connotation: the goal of taking the gospel to the Gentiles is to have the Gentiles turn into those who offer their lives in service of God (12:1-2).
- ✓ One commentator asks, "...how did Paul bring sacrifices to God? Paul brought converted Gentiles to faith in Christ by the preaching of the Word." [Fesko] And that work was a "good" act of worship. It reflected a desire to please God in what he did.
- ✓ Like Paul, when we involve ourselves in the lives of others, we are doing good and worshipping God.

- His work for Christ was by the Holy Spirit's **POWER** (v. 16b)

- ✓ We like miracles: the Red Sea, feed the 5000 and 4000, the man born blind (Jn. 9), and Lazarus. The greatest miracle that ever happens is the miracle of a resurrected spiritual life — dead men made alive. And it happens all the time; Paul himself is a testimony to that (1 Tim. 1:13ff). And so were the Romans (1:7-8). And so are you and I. This room is filled with the miracle of redemption.
- ✓ How does that happen? The **Spirit...sanctifies** — even Gentiles who are "unclean."
- ✓ Some might have said the Gentiles were still unclean because they weren't circumcised; Paul said they have been made clean and set apart for useful service to God. And God did it. (In fact, the entire Triune God is involved in the process — **minister of Christ Jesus...gospel of God...sanctified by the Holy Spirit**). All the Godhead is involved in the miraculous redemption of His people.
- ✓ This was true of Paul and it is true of us — we worship God because He is the One doing the work.
- ✓ We don't make ourselves or our work acceptable to God; the Spirit sanctifies everything we do in caring for one another, making all our work acceptable to Him.
- ✓ We might say it this way —
  - We are good, but it is the Spirit working His goodness in us.
  - We are knowledgeable, but it is the Spirit's Word that informs our minds and hearts.
  - We exhort and counsel, but it is the Spirit who produces transformation.
  - We work; but when we work, we know it's the Spirit's work in us (8:12-14).

**CONCLUSION:** Where do we (GBC) go from here?

We are committed to personally cultivating moral goodness and kindness and growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ so that we can exhort, disciple, and counsel one another to grow in Christ. We do that as an act of worship because He is the One changing us.



At GBC we say it this way: we exist (it's our passion) to *shepherd God's people by God's grace for God's glory*. We intentionally put ourselves in the lives of others to help each other to stimulate more worship of Him.

**BENEDICTION:** Romans 15:13