

Not Just Words
Romans 15:14-16:27
10-4-2026

As we've been looking at the book of Romans for the past several months, chapters 1-11 were primarily theological as he dealt with such doctrines as sin, salvation, righteousness, justification, sanctification, salvation and Christian living and the sovereignty of God.

Chapters 12 through the first half of chapter 15 focused on the application of these doctrines to our lives.

And running through it all, both doctrine and application, is Paul's insistence that his teaching and salvation itself is for everyone, both Jew and Gentile

he wrote in Romans 10:12-13, *"For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

as we finish up this morning, what remains are his personal remarks and greetings
even here we see the universal nature of the gospel in his understanding of God's call on his life as beginning in 15:14 he writes,

***"I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.
(Romans 15:14-19a)***

Dr Evan O'Neil Kane was the chief surgeon at one of the hospitals in NY City and over the course of his 37 years of practice, he performed thousands of surgeries and became extremely concerned with the use of general anesthesia in major surgeries. The dangers often seemed to far outweigh the risks of the surgeries themselves. From his own experience, it seemed that they often did more harm than good, often leaving many patients paralyzed or even dead not from the surgery but the anesthesia

He came to believe that most operations therefore could and should be performed under a local anesthetic instead. Knowing it would take a great deal of effort to convince them, he made it his life mission to prove to his colleagues once and for all the viability of local anesthesia.

To prove it, he needed a patient, a human guinea pig, brave enough to go through what he hoped all patients would one day experience, major surgery without the dangers of general anesthesia.

during his years of practice, he had performed nearly 4000 appendectomies so it seemed like a good choice which would free him from worrying about possible complications from the surgery and focus instead on the local anesthesia aspect. Once he found a patient, he was able to proceed.

The patient was prepped in all the normal ways, but in the operating room, was given only a local anesthetic. As he had done thousands of times before, Kane entered the abdomen, sliced through tissues and clamped blood vessels as he went. Locating the appendix, the surgeon removed it from the surrounding tissue, folded the stump back in place, and sewed up the patient's wounds—all with the patient being wide awake and experiencing only minor discomfort. After a recovery of 2 days, which was much faster than most general anesthesia cases—the patient was released from the hospital to recuperate at home. It was all a tremendous success.

The year was 1921 and Dr Kane's determination and willingness to go against the tide of common medical belief and practice are certainly to be commended and changed the face of medical surgery. But this is not the most remarkable part of the story. What makes it truly amazing is that in order to prove his theory, Dr. Kane was both the surgeon and the patient. He performed the operation on himself and removed his own appendix.

It wasn't just words and ideas for him.

He was willing to back his beliefs with action even when it meant putting his own life on the line.

This is very much like Paul for whom the words of the gospel, the doctrines he taught in Romans, and the actions he called for in response, were not just words on a page, ideas to study, and concepts for others to put into practice

He backed them up with his own life

Probably nowhere was this more obvious than in his work in and among the Gentiles

something he especially emphasizes as he closes his letter to the Romans, stating that he was called by God to be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

He understood that God's call on his life was to reach out to and care for the very people he had been raised to look down on and even despise

People he was brought up believing were inferior and destined for hell

But early on and multiple times throughout the book of Romans he emphasized that all people, both Jew and Gentile alike, were guilty of sin and stand condemned before God, all people, both Jew and Gentile are subject to God's judgment, and that all people, both Jew and Gentile are equally in need of Christ.

As he wrote in chapter 3:23, For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God

And because of this, he faced the scorn and rejection, and just like his Lord before him, ultimately, he also faced the persecution of his own people by putting his words into action

After meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, his life was dedicated to going to, living among, and caring for the very ones his own people hated, the ones he grew up believing were not worthy of God's love only his wrath.

He became the apostle to the Gentiles, the main driver in expanding the gospel beyond his own people and the one who truly sought to fulfill the great commission of Jesus by making disciples of all nations

As Paul had said back in chapter 1, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, both for the Jew and the Gentile.

We can talk about God's love for the world, caring for the poor and outcast, the foreigner and the forgotten, those who are different and despised, but what good are our words if they are confined to sermons and Bible studies, devotional guides and songs.

God gave us his son and his word not just to study and talk about, but to change our lives and to share with others so he can change their lives

Not only does he close with the universal nature of the gospel seen in his calling to reach the people he once despised, but it is also seen in the expanse of his call

Not confined to Israel and telling the same people who had already heard, but called to reach the whole world, especially people and places that never had opportunity to hear about the Lord

Or as Jesus put it, in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth

***"So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen."** (Romans 15:19b–33)*

His was no field of dreams fantasy, that if you build it, they will come

though I have known and been told by some who believed all the church needs to do is build a building and put up a sign and then wait for God to bring people in

then they wondered why people weren't coming and no one was being saved

Nor would Paul abide by those William Carey, the father of modern missions' movement, had to deal with when he was told he didn't need to do anything

As one said to him, if God wants to save the heathen, he doesn't need your help to do it

Though I have also known and been told by some who justified their lack of evangelism by saying God will simply bring whoever he wants into the church and then watched as their churches slowly dwindled away.

As the master in Jesus' parable of the wedding feast told his servants, *"Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full."* (Luke 14:23)

We are our masters' servants

We are called, commissioned, and commanded to go, not to sit and wait

And to go not just to tell, but to share and demonstrate the love of God which is in Christ Jesus

as he wrote back in chapter 10:14-15, ***"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"***

Paul says he went not just to Jerusalem, people he knew and had already heard, but he travelled around Illyricum, a heavily Gentile area on the Balkan Peninsula in the region of what is today Albania, Croatia, and Montenegro.

he planned to visit Rome and then head out to Spain and what was considered the edge of the civilized world

all for the expressed purpose of telling people who had never heard about the salvation of God

we should and need to be grateful and excited about our salvation and all God has done for us but the message of the cross is not meant to be kept to ourselves or inside the walls of church buildings

simply telling and retelling it to those who have already heard

it needs to be spread far and wide to all who will listen regardless of who they are

missions and evangelism are central to what it means to follow Jesus

certainly, it is much more than just words, the topic of bible studies and sermons and special offerings

Jesus commanded us to go and tell, make disciples of all nations, be his witnesses not just at home in our Jerusalem and our Judean backyard, but to Samaria and ultimately the ends of the earth

During the early and mid-part of the 20th century two of the better-known Christian leaders were Donald Barnhouse and Harold John Ockenga. They were close friends and at one point decided to travel across the country together on a special 30 day preaching tour. Each night they were in a different city and different church where they would each preach, taking turns who would preach first each night.

During the course of these thirty days, Ockenga preached a different sermon every night while Barnhouse preached the exact same sermon each night. Having sat through Barnhouses sermon the first several nights, Ockenga decided he would memorize Barnhouses sermon as he listened through the remainder of the tour.

As they arrived at the last church on the last night of the tour, it was Ockenga's turn to preach first so he decided to have a little fun with his friend. As he got up to preach, he started preaching Barnhouse's sermon, word for word and then waited to see what Barnhouse would do. Without missing a beat, when it was his turn, Barnhouse got up and proceeded to preach an entirely different sermon.

After it was all over, Ockenga was pleased with the trick he had played on his friend and said, the congregation sure seemed to enjoy my sermon this evening. To which Barnhouse replied, yes, but not nearly as much as when I preached it three months ago when I was here.

Paul had said back in chapter 10, no one will ever get saved if no one ever goes to tell them about Jesus. These weren't just words to him.

He wasn't content to just keep building on what others were doing, what he calls here building on someone else's foundation, telling those who already knew and had heard.

He wanted to go to those that were being missed, ignored, forgotten and had never heard of Jesus.

So here he writes that he wanted to go to Spain the farthest corner of the empire where no one else had been.

For us this may well mean talking to people we know and have contact with that others do not. If we don't say anything to them, who will?

As the saying goes, if not us, who? If not now, when?

while it may be tempting to skim over or ignore the list of names and greetings Paul is ending his letter with, there is a sense in which they serve as an illustration and exclamation mark on the point he has been making that salvation is for everyone not just a select chosen few.

not just Jew but also Gentile, rich and poor, slave and free, male and female, outcast and foreigner.

The universal nature of the Gospel is seen in the diverse nature of the church to which he writes.

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you

have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings." (Romans 16:1–23)

It wasn't just words to him.

- based on a study of their names, of the 28 people mentioned, 26 by name, historian Peter Lampe concluded that **most were Gentile**
- **Most were either slaves, former slaves or descendants of former slaves**
- And as was largely the case in all the early churches, the majority would have been poor and from the lower classes

Though Paul does also mention some who may have had social standing

- So, he mentions the family or household of Aristobulus, whom some believe to possibly have been the grandson of Herod the Great and a friend of the emperor Claudius.
- And he mentions the household of Narcissus who is believed to have been one of Emperor Claudius' close aids and very wealthy
- 9 were women of whom 4 were singled out as very hard workers in the church
- Phoebe is referred to as a deacon and is the one who Paul entrusted to deliver the letter to the Romans, which meant that he was also entrusted her to be the one to teach it to the Romans
- Paul not only calls Pricilla his coworker but going against convention standard norms, he lists her before her husband Aquilla, indicating her place above his as a church leader
- And Junia is called outstanding, NRSV uses the word prominent among the apostles

All affirming the value of each person to God no matter who they are or what their background and how greatly the gospel transcends our differences,

as Paul had told the Galatians that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female but we are all one in Christ Jesus

Our faith is more than something to talk about among ourselves. it must extend beyond the doors of this church

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen." (Romans 16:25–27)