

Paul's Pride

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Date: 12 March 2017

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[0 : 00] And open up your Bibles to Romans chapter 15.

! Romans chapter 15. If you're using one of our pew Bibles that are scattered around in the chairs,! then simply turn to page 949, and we'll be at the very, very bottom of that page in those pew Bibles.

Otherwise, find Romans 15 in your own copy of the Scriptures, and we are going to jump in this morning at verse 14. I will say before we jump into the Scriptures that I'm glad that you all are here.

I'm glad that you remembered to change your clocks, or that you just decided to use your phone because it automatically changes for you. That's what I do. I don't want to have to remember, and I get confused anyway, and I'll set it to the AM instead of PM or something.

I'll do something incorrectly. So I just use my phone and let it handle it. If ever that messes up, if that system messes up, and my phone doesn't change its clock, I don't know what I'm going to do.

[1 : 04] I won't wake up at the right time. But you guys got up at the right time. You made it here. So, yeah, good job. You're a little sleepy, okay? But that's all right. That's okay. Good job. All right, Romans chapter 15, verse 14.

You've got to stand as we read God's Word together. Paul says, I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God, for I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience, by word and by deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

And thus, I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, those who have never been told of Him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.

[2 : 28] Father, thank You for this word. Thank You for this great gospel-infused letter that we've had the pleasure of learning from.

And I pray as we near the end of it that You would continue to teach us and continue to instruct us through the work of Your Spirit as we study the word. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. You guys take a seat. You know, there are some things that we say, especially things that we say to our kids, if you have kids. There are things that we say to our kids, and we say them so often.

There are times when we pause and we stop and we start to think about what it is we've actually said to them. And sometimes it's difficult to even understand what you yourself mean by some of the things that you say to your kids.

And I was thinking this week, especially as I was reading through this passage, I was thinking this week about some of the things that we sometimes say to our children or to ourselves or to one another about pride, about boastfulness.

[3 : 27] So that we'll say, sometimes we'll say to our kids, stop bragging. Stop boasting. You know, if they do something well, if they win a game, or if they win some sort of trophy or championship, and they're going on and on about it, and they're talking about it, we'll say, stop being prideful.

Stop boasting. But then if they come home with bad grades on their report card, we'll look at them and we'll say, take some pride in yourself. Don't you care? Have a little pride in your grades. And so it can become sort of confusing.

What do we want from them? What do we expect from them? Do we want them to have pride in the things that they do? Or do we not want them to have pride in the things that they do? Do we want them to have some sense of boasting in their accomplishments? Or do we not want them to have some sense of boasting in their accomplishments?

Pride and boasting, they're terms that we use, and we use them in different ways, and sometimes we use them to refer to something that's good and positive and healthy, and sometimes we use those words to refer to something that we know innately is bad and that we shouldn't be doing.

But how do we know the difference? I mean, how do we know when it's appropriate and good to boast in something that we have accomplished, and how do we know when it's bad? And we would look at it and go, oh, that's prideful, oh, that's terrible.

[4 : 35] We wouldn't want to do that sort of thing. Well, I think we can gain a little bit of help here from the Apostle Paul. He's nearing the end of this letter, and he's beginning to talk about what he has done, and then next week we'll see he's going to talk about what his plans are for the future.

But in this passage this week, as he looks back on the things that he has done, he uses this language of pride or boasting. I want you to look right in the middle of our passage at verse 17, and I want you to see what the Apostle Paul says.

He says, In Christ Jesus, then, I have a reason to be proud. Literally, I have a reason for a boast. I have a reason to be proud of my work for God.

Think about that language. Think about what he says. I have a reason to be proud. I have a reason to boast. And he's not boasting in something that someone else has done out there. He says, I have a reason to be proud of my work.

And sometimes that strikes us as odd. That strikes us as strange, because we know that to be prideful in ourselves is a bad thing.

[5 : 43] In fact, you may remember the words of Proverbs 16, where we're told that pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

So that we know both biblically and just sort of from experience and innate sense to take pride in ourselves can be a very bad thing. But obviously here, the Apostle Paul is not boasting in that kind of a way.

Obviously, there's some sense and some way in which Paul can look at his own work. He can look back over the course of his own ministry, see things that he has accomplished, and he can rightfully say, I have a reason because of those things to be proud.

And that pride is not a sinful type of pride. And so I want us to look at this passage this morning so that we can discern, so that we can be able to look and see and know what is the appropriate attitude that we ought to have to the work that we do, specifically the work that we do for the Lord.

Because Paul says, this is his work that he has done for God. How can we know in any given situation, in any set of circumstances, how can we know having done any type of ministry, how can we know, is it good and rightful that I should have some pride in what I have done for the Lord, or is it wrong and sinful that I should have some sort of pride in what I have done for the Lord?

[7 : 08] I think that what Paul says both before and after this verse will help us to discern, will help us to have some ways of gauging whether or not our pride is God honoring, or whether or not our pride is sinful.

So I want us to look at a few elements here just surrounding this verse so we can get a feel, so we can get an understanding of what Paul means here. What kind of boasting does he have in mind that is obviously a good kind of boasting?

The first clue that we have though are the first two words of verse 17. He says, In Christ Jesus. In Christ I have reason to boast. In Him I have a reason for boasting.

And he elaborates on that throughout the passage. Probably the best place to see it though is in verse 18. He says, I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.

And so when Paul speaks of his work for God, he means the work that Christ has done through him for God. In other words, the work that Paul has done is thoroughly God-centered and Christ-centered.

[8 : 17] It is accomplished by the power of God and therefore it resounds to the glory of God. That's how Paul can say it is his work and yet it is in some sense for God.

How can that be? Because the work that Paul does is a work that Christ is accomplishing through him. And if Christ is the ultimate cause, if He's the one really strengthening you and enabling you and causing you to do any sort of work of ministry, then He's the one who gets the honor.

He's the one who gets the glory and the praise at the end of the day for that. And this is how God works consistently. God's going to call us to do all sorts of things. He's going to bring us into all sorts of areas of service and ministry to others and for His sake.

And to the degree that He actually does the work, to the degree that we set ourselves aside, and to the degree that we are willing to say, it's not in my strength, it's not by my ability, but it's by the power of God working through the Spirit that accomplishes that.

To the degree that we're able to do that, to that degree can we rightfully and without sin and be able to look at what we've done and say, I have pride in that. I have a reason for boasting in that.

[9 : 30] This is how God always works. God always works in ways that bring Him the most honor and glory. I want you to think about that.

Think about what I'm saying. God always works in ways that bring Him the most honor and glory. Because that's what God is like.

That's what it means for God to be God. All that He does is aiming at the magnification of His own name. Now sometimes I know that strikes us as strange.

That strikes us as odd. Because we know if we do all things for our own glory, if we do all things to advance our name, that would be wrong and sinful.

And yet God is not like us. He is the Creator and we are the creature. And so while all that we are to do is supposed to be for Him, for someone outside of us, there is no one outside of God who is more worthy of glory and honor than God Himself.

[10 : 31] So that for God to do that which is good and right and true, God has to do everything for the sake of His own glory, for the sake of His own praise.

That's how God operates. We see this consistently throughout the entire Bible. So for instance, you can turn to Genesis chapter 1. And you can see there in the beginning that God Himself is creating all things.

He's not dependent on anyone else. He's not making things for the sake of anyone else. In fact, when Paul reflects back upon the creation, Paul says that all things are made through Him and for Him.

He makes all things for Himself. And that's why He stands alone in Genesis. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

He needed no help. He needed no assistance. You know, what's interesting is that biblically based religions, what I mean is the religions that draw their core beliefs from the Bible, that is who adhere to, say, the Genesis account of creation.

[11 : 37] These are the only religions in human existence in which you find a creation story where the Creator, the God who's responsible for everything, does it all by Himself.

In all the myths of the ancient world and all the other religions that you can find out in the world, the world is created and is born out of some struggle among many gods. It's not born out of simply the will and desire and power of one singular God Himself.

That's not how the religions of the world view things. That's not the world view that they operate out of. But the God of the Bible is a God who does all things, even creates the world and brings it into existence for His own sake and for the praise of His own name.

But it's not just creation. And everything that God does ultimately aims at His own glory. In fact, I want to show you a couple of passages. Hold your place there in Romans and turn back in your Old Testament to the book of Isaiah.

Turn to the prophet Isaiah. We could probably read verse after verse from the book of Isaiah and see this theme of God doing all things for His own glory. But I just want to point to a couple of places in which we see this.

[12 : 52] So, for instance, if you turn to Isaiah chapter 42. We read this in Isaiah chapter 42 verse 8. God is speaking and He says, I am the Lord.

Now, the word Lord there is in all capital letters. And for those of you who don't know, if you're reading the Old Testament and you see the name Lord in all capital letters, that's God's name, Yahweh, or sometimes pronounced as Jehovah by some folks.

But that's His name. And He's saying, I am the Lord. This is who I am. And then He says, that is my name. Now, notice what He says next, though. My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

God will not share His praise. He will not share His glory. That's who He is, and that's what He is like. Turn over a few pages in Isaiah, and we can even move a little further in this direction, where we can see in Isaiah chapter 48, Paul is not speaking here of creation, and he's not speaking in a more general sense.

He's speaking of His salvation of the people of Israel. And listen to what he says about His saving work, which we are most prone to think, well, God saves people because they're worthy.

[14 : 14] Or God saves people because He sees in them such value and worth. And yet, that's not the picture that's painted in Scripture. Isaiah 48, verse 9, God says, For my name's sake, I defer my anger.

For the sake of my praise, I restrain it from you. In other words, I'm not giving you the judgment that you deserve. I'm showing you mercy, that I may not cut you off. He says, verse 10, That's what God is like.

God does not share His glory. Even in the work of salvation, He is ultimately saving people so that they might exist for the praise and glory of His own name.

So that in everything that God does, He is working for His honor and for His glory. And so if we are going to be able to look at anything that we do, at any ministry that we engage in, at any great effort that we put towards something, we have to keep in mind, first and foremost, it must be for God.

It must aim at the glory of God. And in order for that to happen, it has to be something that God does through us. If we do even things that look to the world as great ministry things, even if in the world's eyes we accomplish great things in ministry itself or in the proclamation of the gospel, even if we do that, if it's done in our own strength, if it's not done by God Himself, then we will receive a portion of the praise.

[16 : 04] And God will not have that. God will not share His glory. He will not share His praise with anyone. So if you want to be able to rightfully and righteously boast and have pride in the work that you do for the Lord, it has to actually be accomplished by His power and not by your own.

Notice how much Paul emphasizes that though. He says, By word and deed, this is what He did, By word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.

It has to be the work of the Holy Spirit in us and through us in order for God to receive all of the honor and all of the glory. And so you want to know if it's okay, if it's right and good for you to boast in the work that you've done for the Lord, then ask yourself a very simple question.

Did I do that by my own strength and my own cunning and my own ability and my own wit and my own intelligence? Or was God somehow supernaturally working in me to do things and accomplish things that I could never have done on my own?

I can remember the first time that I ever preached. The first time. It was unexpected. It was out of the blue. I was only 16 years old. I had never preached before. I had only taught a few Bible studies to some other teenagers.

[17 : 27] I was not a preacher. And yet I got a call from the pastor of a little church outside the town where I lived and he said, we'd like you to come preach this Sunday. And I literally said, I think that you've got the wrong person.

I thought that he had called the wrong... Even though he had my name, I thought that he had the wrong person. And he said, no, no, no. My sons are leading the worship. We want a service that's led all by teenagers.

We don't have a teenager in our church that can preach and teach. And so somebody gave me your name and I'd like you to come this Sunday. This was a Wednesday. I'd like you to come this Sunday and preach for us.

Okay. But again, I don't know how to preach. And he said, that's fine. It'll be okay. You just come and share the word of the Lord with us.

Now, I'll be honest with you. As a pastor, I would never, not in a thousand years, would I ever do that. All right? But I'm grateful that he did because I didn't know what I was doing.

[18 : 24] I prepared a sort of a sermon on the denials of Peter in the garden there outside in the little courtyard there as Jesus was on trial. I prepared what you might call a sermon.

I'm not sure. Half of it just consisted of me babbling, I think. But by the end of it, I felt as if I had actually explained the Scriptures. I had actually taught them.

And yet, I didn't know how I had done that. How had I gotten through this sermon? How in the world had I been able to do this? I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know how to do it. And yet, I knew that in that moment, God had done something through me that I'd never experienced before.

And in that moment, I knew that I was called to the ministry of preaching the Gospel and teaching the Word. Not because it was something that I sought after. I, generally speaking, preferred not to be the center of attention and preferred not to be in front of a group of people talking.

But God did something through me. And I knew in that moment, because He did it, it was a good thing. It was a thing that I could cling to and I could always look back upon and say, God did that through me.

[19 : 34] And I could be proud of that moment as a clueless 16-year-old preaching to a little church of about 30 people. I could be proud of that moment because it wasn't my moment.

It was the Lord working through me. Now, to be honest, in the years since then, I have preached some sermons in the power of the Spirit of God. And I have preached some sermons because I was obstinate throughout the week and I just pressed forward with what I wanted to do.

And I've preached some sermons under my own ability and under my own power. And I have gone home with my head hanging low. There are times when we try to do ministry and we don't do it in the power of the Spirit and we don't do it in obedience to what God wants us to do.

But when we do it by the power of the Spirit, when it is clear that He has called us to it and He is at work and He's doing it by His own power, then we have every right to look at those moments and be proud and say, look at what I've done for the Lord on this day.

Look at what He has accomplished through me. That's how Paul was able to say in 1 Corinthians 15. He says, I worked harder than them all, which sounds terribly boastful, right? But he follows it up with, but not I, the grace of God within me.

[20 : 48] If we can look back on what we do, whatever ministry you do, and it may be something big, it may be something small, it may be something that everyone is aware of or no one is aware of, but if you can look back on the ministry that you do and the service that you offer to the Lord, and if you can say, I worked hard, but not me.

It was the grace of God. It was the Spirit of God working in and through me. And you can be proud without being guilty of sin in that moment.

But I want you to look a little bit more closely at the passage because I want us to see what exactly is it that Paul is proud of? What is it that God has done through him?

He tells us explicitly, verse 18, I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, and here it is, here's Paul's ministry, to bring the Gentiles to obedience.

That was Paul's calling. Remember we looked at that last week as we were in the paragraph before this one. We looked at the reality that God's plan to save the Gentiles, that is God's plan to save people who were not a part of ethnic Israel, who were not Jews, not descendants of Abram.

[21 : 59] God's plan was a plan that went all the way back to the beginning. It wasn't something new when Jesus came on the scene or new when the Apostle Paul came on the scene. This was God's plan all along. He was always going to save people from every tribe and tongue and nation through the offspring, through the seed of Abram.

He was always going to do that. And Paul understands and sees his ministry in connection with what God is doing. And Paul has a call. A call that he received from Christ himself on the road to Damascus as Jesus appeared to him.

He has a clear calling to be about the work of preaching the gospel to Gentiles, to bringing Gentiles to the obedience of faith as he says elsewhere. Paul's calling, Paul's role in ministry was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

He even takes it a step further though and he defines it a little bit further. He says that, from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum, I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

What a thing to be able to say. To be able to say that I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ. To be able to say, I have done that which God has called me to do.

[23 : 12] Verse 20, he says, Thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but, and now he's going to quote from the Old Testament as more support for the calling to preach to the Gentiles.

But as it is written, those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand. Paul knew what his calling was. Paul understood that he had a unique calling to take the gospel and to preach it among Gentiles who had never heard before.

That was what Paul was supposed to be about. That's what his ministry was about. Sure, he would first, in every city he would go, and he would go to the synagogue and he would preach the gospel to the Jews. He would always do that.

But then, as soon as he was rejected by them, he would immediately go to the Gentiles. And that was his regular pattern because he knew that he had a clear calling all over the Roman Empire and even beyond the reach of the empire.

he had a clear calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Now, there is a very real sense in which we share in that calling. There is.

[24 : 19] Because Jesus gives the great commission to all of his followers. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, of all, it's the same word that's translated as Gentiles, really, of all the nations, of all the Gentiles, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

We have a clear mission that's been given to all of us within the body of Christ. We are supposed to be about the business of preaching the gospel, of sharing the gospel with people who have not yet heard.

That might be your neighbor, that might be your co-worker, that might be a family member, or it might be someone on the other side of the world. But we all share in some sense in this calling that Paul had.

Yes, Paul is unique. He is the apostle to the Gentiles. His calling was unique and was for him, but his calling was a part of the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

And our calling as faithful followers of Jesus is to be about doing the work of the Great Commission everywhere that we go. And it's twofold. It's preaching the gospel.

[25 : 27] It's conversion. It's seeking the conversion. That is, Jesus calls it the baptism of others, but it's also teaching. It's also discipling. It's also taking those converts, those new believers, and it's instructing them and teaching them in the Word.

And we are all supposed to, in one way or another, we are all supposed to be about that. In your neighborhood, in your office, or in your warehouse, in your home, when you have family gatherings, wherever you are, you're supposed to be about the business of pressing and pushing for the gospel.

And if it's among people who already believe the gospel, then you use the gospel and you use the Word of God to instruct them and deepen them in the things of God. All of us are called to be a part of the Great Commission.

That's why as a church, we've established a really simple mission statement. It's easy to remember and it's to the point. We exist to glorify God. That's that first part, right? It's all going to be for His glory.

We exist to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ. That's why we're here as a church. That's why you're here as an individual follower of Christ.

[26 : 42] That's what we are supposed to be about. And that may mean that you have to do the difficult thing of walking next door, knocking on the door, and beginning to build a relationship with them and sharing the gospel with them.

Or it might mean that you have to say to that grumpy, grouchy family member who never wants to hear anything about Jesus. It may mean that you have to look them in the eye and tell them about Jesus even if it results in you being rejected by them.

It may mean that you have to sit down for lunch with a co-worker that you don't get along with and try to build a bridge so that someday they might be willing to hear the gospel from you. All of us in one way or another are called to be engaged in this task of taking the gospel to those who have not heard and teaching and discipling and training up those who have heard.

That's what the Great Commission is all about. And if we do that, if we are engaged in the very thing that God has called us to do, if we do it by the power of the Holy Spirit and for the sake of the glory of God, then we can look at whatever that ministry is and we can be proud of it.

Now, there are going to be tedious moments in all of these things. Sometimes we read of Paul's having gone all the way from Jerusalem around to Illyricum and we have pictured in our minds these great lofty travels and accomplishments of the Apostle Paul.

[28 : 07] But the reality is the vast majority of Paul's time in ministry trying to get the gospel to those who have not heard was spent in the midst of tedious, tedious tasks.

So just think about what it takes to travel from one city to another. I mean, it's tedious today. We're going on a mission trip to Guatemala at the end of July, beginning of August.

And to go on that trip, we're going to have to raise some money. We're going to have to buy airline tickets. We're going to have to figure out what to pack. And some of us are going to have to get passports. And there are a lot of tedious little tasks to do in order to even get ready to go on that trip.

And then there are a lot of little things to do while we're there all for the sake of sharing the gospel with people in Guatemala. Well, think about the Apostle Paul. He couldn't get on a plane and travel to another city or get in a car.

It was even more tedious for him. To travel from one city to the next might take hours or it might take days or weeks depending upon how far he was going. And all along the way he was taking his tent making materials and dragging along all the things that he needed, provisions and food while he was on the road.

[29 : 17] So gathering that stuff, getting those things ready was a tedious, probably boring, monotonous task that the Apostle Paul was frequently engaged in.

Which means that not every step of the way of doing the ministry of the gospel for the glory of God by the power of God is going to appear as if it is all those things.

It won't always look that way. There are those moments like I had the first time that I preached. There are those moments when you actually finally get to speak the gospel to someone else and see how they respond.

There are those moments but most of the work most of the work is tediousness. Most of the work is not quitting before you're finished.

Most of the work is getting to the destination so that once you're there you might have an open path to proclaim the gospel. You might have to sit down with your grumpy co-worker for lunch for six months before you ever have an opening for the preaching of the gospel.

[30 : 24] Are those six months wasted? Is it just the only thing that matters is that moment? No. It is all done. Paul wouldn't mention his travels from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum if none of it mattered.

It all matters and it is all a part of the great work that God is doing through us to accomplish the great commission. And so we can look even at those tedious moments even at those boring moments even at the day in and day out of daily life lived in service of the gospel and we can say I have reason to be proud of that.

You have reason to be proud of fixing breakfast for your children if it aims at the discipling of your children. you have reason to be proud of all the little moments and all the little things that you have to do within your daily work life if all of those things ultimately serve to provide you with opportunities to share the gospel with people around you.

The great danger is that we would do all of those things and forget why we're doing them. The great danger is that we would get busy about all the things that are necessary for the work of ministry and then we would forget the goal.

Or we would forget the one who's supposed to strengthen us to accomplish the goal. And Paul would remind us here that we have a clear calling.

[31 : 52] We have one who supplies us with the strength to do it. And in all the little things that we do we're moving steadily toward that goal.

In all the little things even in his travels in everything that we're doing on a daily basis it can be for the glory of God and with the aim of spreading the gospel of God and raising up people.

In fact, Paul gets a little bit more specific on that aspect of how his ministry of the gospel actually affects believers. He opened this passage by saying that he's confident in the Romans even though he doesn't know them he feels good about them.

He says, I'm satisfied about you. He feels good about them. He thinks that they're doing things well. And then he goes on and says, but even though I believe that you're filled with goodness and filled with all knowledge even though that's the case he acknowledges that in this letter that he's written to them he's said some pretty hard things.

He really has. He says in verse 15 on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder. I've done that. I've had to say some things that are a little bit difficult.

[33 : 07] I've had to get in your face a little bit and tell you don't do this. Do this. He acknowledges that. I've had to do some of that he says. But the reason that he did that he says is because of the grace given to me by God.

That's his calling. God has graciously called God to this ministry. And then listen to how he describes his ministry though. He says that he is called to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

This is some strange language that he uses here. It's actually language that's generally associated with the Old Testament sacrificial system. And you can see that pretty clearly. He talks about priestly service. He talks about offerings.

He talks about things being sanctified. That's the language of the Old Testament sacrificial system. And Paul is borrowing that language from the Old Testament and he's using it to describe his ministry among the Gentiles.

And why does he do that? What is his point? Well, to understand his point you have to understand at least to some degree what the point of the old system was. why did they have all of those rules and regulations?

[34 : 27] Why so many rules about when and how often and how frequently they had to wash their hands? There are a lot of laws in the Old Testament about washing your hands.

Why so many laws about washing hands? Or why so many rules about who could go into what part of the temple and who could not? And when could someone go into this portion of the temple and not that?

And what did a person have to do to get ready to go into the temple? What did a priest have to do in order to get ready to offer sacrifices? It was an extensive list of things that the old covenant people of God had to do in their priestly service at the temple.

Why does Paul use this language? Because all of those instructions were meant to teach the Israelites that in order to approach God and in order to serve God you need to be holy.

You need to be set apart and different. All those impurities need to be washed away and set aside. And so you have the washing of hands not because they wanted to get rid of germs.

[35 : 29] You have the washing of hands to symbolize that they need to come into God's presence as holy and pure. And that's what Paul highlights. He says that the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

The goal of the Apostle Paul and all that he does within the churches and especially among the Gentiles is that there might be a holy people set apart for God.

And that ought to be our goal. When we think about what's our role in ministry in the body of Christ? What are we trying to do? What are we trying to accomplish? It's easy when we go out there, we say, oh, we're preaching the gospel.

We want people to be saved. We want people to believe and repent and be saved from their sins. That's not complicated to define. But when we look inwardly within the church, we say, what really is our goal? I mean, make disciples, but what does that mean?

I mean, yes, we teach them truth, we teach them doctrine, but what does that do? What are we trying to accomplish? And the Apostle Paul tells us what we are trying to do is we are laboring and striving, as we have seen him argue throughout this last section of Romans, we are laboring and striving for one another's holiness, for the sanctification of other people around us.

[36 : 44] And when we look at the work that we've done for the Lord, if it has been done by the power of the Holy Spirit, if it has been done for the glory of God, if it has been done by the preaching and teaching of the gospel, and if it aims at the holiness of God's people, then we have a right to look and be proud of the work that we have done for the Lord.

There is great joy to be had in righteous pride for what you've done for the Lord. And I want you to have that joy. I want you to experience that joy.

I want you to know it. I don't want ministry to be a burden to you. I don't want you to think about your involvement in the church and think, well, I better do something. I don't know. I mean, I don't really want to do anything, but I better do something.

I don't want you to have that approach to life within the church and to your evangelistic ministry outside the church. I want you to have joy. I want you to be able to look at the things that you do for the Lord and say, I have reason to be proud of that.

I have a reason to boast in that. Paul says, paraphrasing the prophet Jeremiah, Paul says, let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

[38 : 03] Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. And that should govern all of our thinking. When it comes to what we are going to do for the Lord, that should govern all of our thinking.

Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. It is entirely possible to accomplish things, to do things that seem impressive to others in ministry and in the service of the gospel and yet not to do it in such a way that we are boasting in the Lord.

Paul acknowledges that in the book of Philippians. Paul speaks of those who preach Christ out of envy and selfish ambition. Now, Paul is at least grateful in that moment that the gospel is being proclaimed.

But imagine being one of those about whom the apostle Paul would have to say, yeah, you preach the gospel, but it's out of envy. Selfish ambition.

That's why you preach the gospel. It is entirely possible to do things for God, ultimately for yourself and the praise of your own name.

[39 : 18] And that's not what Paul is speaking of here. Paul is telling us that there is another way. There is a way to be fully engaged in the work that God has given for you to do.

For you to be able to look back upon the work that you've done and be proud, to look forward and expect to be proud of what you are doing for the Lord. But it must be for His glory done by His strength.

It must be done with the gospel at the center of it to take the gospel and obey the Great Commission. And it must be done for the sake of the holiness of the people of God. It must be.

And the truth is that if your religion, if your spiritual life consists primarily of thinking in terms of what you've accomplished on your own, which we don't put in that terminology, we say things like, I mean, I think I'll be acceptable to God because I'm a pretty good person.

I think I'm okay. I think I'll be okay because I've done some pretty good stuff. That is not the gospel. And that does not bring glory to God. And the truth of the matter is if you have that approach to thinking about your own relationship to the Lord and your own spiritual or religious life, then none of the kind of boasting that Paul talks about here is possible for you.

[40 : 38] It must begin with acknowledging that you are unworthy and you are a sinner and he has done all that is necessary in Christ and through Christ to make you right with him.

And when you begin that way, then you set a path that says it's by his power and his strength and his accomplishment and for his glory that I have been saved and that I am now laboring.

Let's pray. Let's pray.