

# SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**ROM. 15:15** Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God,

**16 That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.**

17 I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.

**18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,**

19 Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

**20 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation:**

21 But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.

**22 For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.**

23 But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you;

**24 Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your *company*.**

25 But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints.

**26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.**

27 It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.

## NOTES

# Ministry to Unbelievers

Lesson Text: Romans 15:15-27

Related Scriptures: Romans 1:10-17; II Corinthians 10:12-18;  
Isaiah 52:10-15

TIME: A.D. 56

PLACE: from Corinth

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"As it is written, To whom [Christ] was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand" (Romans 15:21).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **MINISTRY PRIVILEGE—**

**Rom. 15:15-17**

**Gift of grace (Rom. 15:15).** Paul had never been to Rome or assisted in the church's founding. That alone would have prevented a less courageous person from saying some of what Paul wrote. That he was "putting [them] in mind" (vs. 15) simply meant that he was speaking to them by way of reminder. Neither their conversion nor their knowledge was being called into question.

The "grace" given to Paul refers to the spiritual gifts given him as a minister of Christ (12:6).

**Offering of Gentiles (Rom. 15:16-17).** The word "ministering" means "to serve as a priest". One of the primary functions of a priest was to offer sacrifices. As Gentiles came to faith in Christ through gospel preaching (Rom. 10:13-17), they then became an offering to God.

### **MINISTRY POWER—Rom. 15:18-21**

**Signs and wonders (Rom. 15:18-19).** Rather than boasting in the things he had accomplished, Paul saw himself

as God's instrument (I Cor. 3:5-6). "Word and deed" (15:18) likely refers to Paul's words and actions, not to the people he led to Christ. God not only ordains the end, but also the means to the end, which includes preaching the gospel.

The "mighty signs and wonders" Paul alludes to in Romans 15:19 were the various miracles that were part and parcel of the ministry of an apostle (II Cor. 12:12).

Biblical miracles were instantaneous, complete, and could not be otherwise explained. Today, people often call things "miracles" that can be explained in other ways. What some call miracles are really acts of divine providence.

As Acts reveals, he preached in many different cities throughout the Greco-Roman world. Illyricum, however, is never mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. This area is on the northwest portion of the Balkan peninsula and corresponds to the region occupied by the former Yugoslavia. It was likely that this was the farthest Roman province from Jerusalem he had visited in his evangelistic work.

**Serving the unreached (Rom. 15:20-21).** True to his missionary spirit, Paul wanted to share Christ and plant churches in places where people had never heard the gospel. This helped him avoid the kinds of problems frequently faced by those who take over a ministry that has been started by someone else. People are not always accepting of change.

#### **MINISTRY PLANS—Rom. 15:22-27**

**Hindered from coming (Rom. 15:22-23).** Paul had planned to visit Rome many times but had been hindered in doing so (1:13). His stated purpose was so he could “have some fruit among [them] also, even as among other Gentiles.”

Paul wanted to go to otherwise unreached regions. Rome already had a strong Christian community, so Paul was not planning on staying there on any permanent basis; he would only be passing through, with a relatively short stay. That he had a “great desire these many years” (vs. 23) to visit the Roman saints was not a spur-of-the-moment whim, either. It was part of his larger plan of evangelizing new regions.

**Helping Paul (Rom. 15:24-25).** The next major body of land to the west of Rome was Spain, and this was Paul’s goal. Paul may have planned to stay several months with the Roman brethren before setting off to new territory. “And to be brought on my way thitherward by you” (vs. 24) implies that he hoped the Christians in Rome would assist him financially on his missionary endeavor to Spain.

At the time of writing Romans, Paul was headed for Jerusalem for the purpose of delivering offerings that had been collected for the poor. But it was while he was in Jerusalem that he was falsely accused, arrested, and ultimately sent to Rome as a prisoner.

**Helping the poor (Rom. 15:26-27).** Early in his apostolic ministry, Paul had been asked to remember the poor in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9-10), something he was more than willing to do. To accomplish this, Paul and others collected money from the predominantly Gentile congregations to share with the poor disciples in the city where the church had been originally founded. Gentile believers had benefited from the spiritual blessings first given to the Jews through the gospel. They were, as Paul says, “partakers of their spiritual things” (Rom. 15:27). Consequently, it was obligatory for Gentile believers to share their “carnal things,” that is, their material blessings, with their Jewish brethren in Jerusalem.

—John Alva Owston.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. What was the “grace” given to Paul (Rom. 15:15)?
2. How were Gentile converts an offering to God?
3. What was one of the identifying marks of a true apostle?
4. Do you think miracles occur today? How would you define a miracle?
5. Where was Illyricum?
6. Why did Paul not want to preach where others had already evangelized?
7. What plans did Paul have for future mission work?
8. What was Paul’s purpose in traveling to Rome?
9. When Paul wrote Romans, where was he headed? Why?
10. According to Paul, why should Gentile believers help Jewish believers?

—John Alva Owston.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. All believers require thorough biblical teaching (Rom. 15:15).
2. Those who believe the gospel are a pleasing offering to the Lord (vs. 16).
3. We should never boast of accomplishments as our own, but only of what the Lord has graciously done through us (vss. 17-20).
4. We must be willing to go wherever the Holy Spirit leads, especially to those who have never had exposure to the gospel (vss. 21-23).
5. Those who have benefited from the gospel ministry owe a debt of material gratitude to those who brought them the gospel (vss. 24-25).
6. Ministering the gospel involves meeting material as well as spiritual needs (vss. 26-27).

—Valante M. Grant.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What does Paul mean when he says that those who were saved through his preaching are an offering to God? Discuss.
2. If our ministry is successful, who should get the credit? Why?
3. Share and discuss your personal experiences in witnessing to unbelievers. What aspects could use some improvement?
4. What should be the attitude of those who have been saved toward those who brought the gospel to them?
5. When sharing the gospel, should we be concerned about the material needs of people we witness to? Why or why not?

—Valante M. Grant.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“As it is written, To whom [Christ] was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand” (Romans 15:21).**

The Apostle Paul had a sense of mission—even a divine calling—to serve the Lord by ministering in ways that others were not. He earnestly desired to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, far and wide (Rom. 15:16-21).

In our golden text, Paul quoted Isaiah 52:15 to express his own goal in ministry; namely, to preach the gospel to those who had not heard it before. Paul saw his own ministry as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, as he took the gospel to new areas as a pioneer missionary.

Paul was not one of the original apostles. He had become an apostle later, upon his conversion. Up until that time, the apostles had been witnessing mainly to the Jews. But Paul knew that he was to minister to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16).

Paul lived with an absolute conviction that he was to fulfill the Great Commission, and so should we. Our Lord Jesus told us that we are to reach the entire world (Matt. 28:19-20).

Our role in fulfilling Christ’s commission may be different. Sometimes God even asks us to do what others would not.

The people the Lord wants me to minister to will not all be the same ones He sends others to. He does this so that everyone hears His Word and has opportunity to turn to Him (cf. Matt. 24:14). We need to seek out what God has for us. He equips each of us for a unique role in His work (cf. I Cor. 12:4-11).

—Jennifer Francis.