

The Gospel According to Paul: Romans

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Closing of the Letter (15:14-16:27)

Pauline Travelogue (15:14-33)

From Jerusalem and Round About to Illyricum

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. ¹⁵Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶that I might be a minister (leitourgon) of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering (hierourgounta – serving in the sacred/priestly service of) the gospel of God, that the offering (prosphora – sacrifice) of the Gentiles might be acceptable (euprospektos), sanctified (hagiazo-having been made holy) by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.

In verses 14-15, Paul's encouragement of the church at Rome takes the form of complimentary statements. They are **(1)** full of goodness, **(2)** filled with knowledge, **(3)** able to teach or admonish one another or others. With the presence of these characteristics within the membership, the exhortation of edification has every reason of resolving their problems. Even so, he had brought some things to their remembrance that he considered necessary, drawing on the gifts of grace imparted to him from

God.

Paul's View of the Gentiles as Acceptable to God

Here in verses 16-17, he presents a series of liturgical terms associated with the worship of the temple:

. . . that I might be a minister (leitourgos – one who performs public service) of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering (hierourgeo – function as a priest, perform sacred services) the gospel of God, that the offering (prosphora – sacrifice) of the Gentiles might be acceptable (euprosdektos – well pleasing), sanctified (hagiazō-having been made holy) by the Holy Spirit.

This is the same language he used in chapter 12:1,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer/present (paristemi, a technical term in the Greek language for placing something before God as a gift or sacrifice [cf., Josephus, Antiquities IV.6.4]), your bodies as living sacrifices (thusia," the word used throughout the Mediterranean world for a sacrifice); holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship (latreia, spiritual ritual or service).

Paul had fulfilled his role as God's *leitourgos* (minister in sacred service), and had brought the Gentiles to God and presented them as an acceptable offering. "Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God," he says in verse 17. Paul had fulfilled the apostolic commission of his Lord, given to him at his conversion in Damascus of Syria. There Jesus had said to him,

. . . I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. ¹⁷I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me,' (Acts 26:16-19).

"I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," Paul said, and for over

twenty years since that event, Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, had gone to the Gentiles; called the “*goyim*” by the Jews, or by the Greek speaking Jews, the *ho heteros ethnos* – the other race. He assures the Gentile believers of the church in Rome that they had received forgiveness of sins, and a place among those who are made holy by faith in Christ (cf., Romans 15:17).

Those Who Were the Object of Paul’s Evangelistic Activity

In verse 18 he continues,

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--¹⁹by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.²⁰It 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.²¹Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand," [Isaiah 52:15], (Romans 15:18-21).

What Paul says here should give us a precedent with reference to our objectives to spread the story of Jesus. “So I have made it my aim,” Paul says, “to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation.” Paul’s target audience was those who did not know Christ, not those who had misinterpreted the message of Christ. The “unconverted” to Paul were those who had not named Jesus as the Christ.

Those on whom our greatest interest should focus are those who don’t know Jesus. The practice non-denominational Christianity is our choice, which does not, of necessity, put us at enmity with the denominational world. Discussions with people of the various denominations within Christianity is completely appropriate, if done in the spirit of Jesus; but those for whom we should have the greatest concern are those who have not named the name of Jesus, who know little, if anything, about him. It is to these that our story needs desperately to be told.

Far too much “evangelistic” activity is spent in denominational disputes and debates over dogma, and far too little of our efforts spent on

trying to arouse the interest of our culture concerning who Jesus of Nazareth was; and far too little public confession of who we believe him “to have been” and who we believe him “to be.”

Paul’s concern, as reflected in Acts of Apostles and in his letters, was to take the message that the Messiah had come to the synagogues throughout the Mediterranean world, and then to take the message of God’s visitation to mankind to the world that did not know the God of the Jewish tradition. In both activities his objective or aim was,

. . . to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,²¹ but as it is written: ‘To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall

If Paul were preaching to the people of the community of which we are a part, what message would he present to bring them back into fellowship with God? The one which tells them what they most need to know: (1) that God is and he is one, (2) that we are beings created in the image of God, (3) that the human race has destroyed themselves through defiant, self-willed, rebellion against the Creator, (4) that God longs to have us back within his fellowship, (5) for that to happen men must seek him and desire to know him, (6) and return to him in repentance with a desire to become one with the one who created them, and (7) that can only be done by following the Son (Jesus of Nazareth), who came to lead us back to the Father.

Paul’s Plans to Visit Rome

For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.²³ But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you,²⁴ whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.

Here we have a somewhat curious set of statements by Paul, as relates to his activity as a one inspired of God in his teaching and writings. His statements are problematic, however, depending on one’s concept of inspiration, or one’s concept of how one inspired of God receives his

message. There is no indication that Paul ever stopped in Rome on his way to Spain, or that he ever went to Spain. What does this imply about his claims to inspiration, and what does his uncertainty concerning his future activities imply about the accuracy of his message. Does the possibility that he did not do what he said he was going to do concerning his plans to go to Spain and Rome imply that he did not have the gift of inspiration from God?

Questions Concerning Paul's Inspiration

Some biblical scholars who question the concept of inspiration phrase the problem as a Watergate question, "What did he know and when did he know it?" Apostolic inspiration and the role of authority in the letters of Paul are supposedly at issue here. Great weight is given to the presence of all the uncertainty in what Paul says with reference to his plans.

When is what he writes to be understood as having "apostolic authority," and when is he giving counsel, or when is he expressing his desires without knowing by inspiration what will actually come to pass? In verse 29, he says, "I know that when I come to you." What did he actually know? In 1 Cor 11:23 he writes, "for I received of the Lord what I also passed on to you," implying that he was drawing from a tradition or preserved "*testimonium*" of Jesus. In 1 Cor 7:25, he writes, "I have no word from the Lord, but I give my judgment (*gnome* – advise or opinion) as one who by the Lord's mercy is faithful (*pistos*)," implying that he considered his judgment to be faithful to the will of God.

To say that a given spokesman or writer is inspired of God is to imply that what he says under the inspiration is in harmony with the will of God. In John 14:26, Jesus told the twelve that the Holy Spirit would be given to them to teach them all things and to bring to remembrance all that he had said to them. Their insight and understanding of the will of God was what was given in the promise of inspiration, but this does not necessarily imply that every word that they spoke or wrote would be given to them by God. His promise wasn't a promise of infallibility in all that they said and did in every utterance and action of their lives.

All Communication Is Not Revelation

When Paul said in verse 24, "I shall come to you," he was simply

expressing intention and desire. Throughout the Old Testament God revealed his will to man in a variety of ways: dreams, trances, dark speech and utterances, and often putting the very words into their mouths, but every statement of a prophet was not a prophetic utterance or a revelation from God.

The claim of inspiration does not imply that everything that comes from the mouth or pen of one inspired of God is revelation from God. All that Paul wrote to the churches in his letters was inspired of God because he possessed the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts empowered by the presence of the Spirit. As he says in Romans 15:1-16,

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.

The “grace (*charis*)” given to him was the gift of the aid of the Holy Spirit in his labors in the gospel. Then, in verses 18-19, he says,

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--¹⁹ by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

Paul was inspired in his letter writing enterprises, but not all was revelation from God concerning all present and futuristic events occurring within the first century Mediterranean world. Paul’s expressions here in Romans 15:22-24, are simply truthful and honest expressions of Paul’s desire to include Rome in his future activities. There is nothing false or erroneous about his statements, they are simply his intended plans or expressed desires, and there is no indication that God had revealed the future to him in regard to these desires.

In John 14:25-26, Jesus had said to his disciples, who later became his apostles,

All this I have spoken while still with you.²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Two statements here are important to the promise of inspiration of the Holy Spirit Jesus made to his apostles. First, the Spirit would teach them all things, i.e., he would give them insight and understanding concerning the will of God; and, secondly, he would give them faithful and accurate recall of what Jesus had taught them. Then, in John 16:12-15 he told them,

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

From what Jesus says here, the apostles were not to expect to be fully enlightened concerning all things God wished them to know at a given point in time (e.g., on Pentecost); rather, they would be given insight when it was necessary for them to know what God wished to reveal to them. In Luke 12:11-12,

When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, ¹²for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.

The concept that every word uttered or expression of thought made by one who was at some time inspired of God in what he said or did, is not rooted in the teaching of Jesus, nor the Scriptures. When and how one is inspired of God is the choice of God and him alone. The speaker or writer is fully aware that he is under the influence of the Spirit of God and often informs his reader of such; but, it is not necessary to an accurate or legitimate concept of inspiration that everything said by a given writer that everything he says is chiseled in stone as were the ten words of the two tablets of Decalogue. What such a writer dictates or pens, however, is not subject to the charge of error, untruth, or inaccuracy. Sometimes the use of the terminology involved or the simple use of grammar is a clear indication that the statement being made is subjunctive or contingent.

Conclusion

The belief in inspiration of Scripture simply means that the will of

God is accurately expressed in the message conveyed by the writer of the message or document; it does not mean that every verbal utterance and scratch of a pen came directly from God. Such a view is not very realistic and, indeed, is not necessary to a legitimate belief in the inspiration of the writers of Scripture.

As Peter said in 2 Peter 1:21, “men spoke being carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The expression “carried along” is *pheromenoi*, a passive participle of *phero* meaning, “to be borne, to be under a moving influence such as wind, etc.). This word was used as a nautical term for a ship being driven before the wind. A ship’s movement, even though assisted by the wind, is yet under the influence of its facilities, the sails, rigging, stern, and activity of the crew. It does not become a totally passive object of the force of the wind; so also with the writers of Scripture.

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