A Short Study on the Theological Basis for Globalising Missions

A Brief Look at Paul's Missionary Vision (Rom. 15:14-33)

In Romans chapters 1-11 Paul gives a great exposition of Christian truth – the Gospel – and then in chapters 12:1-15:3 he gives us a great exhortation on the basics of discipleship – i.e. living out the Gospel in real life. But the Book of Romans is not over yet. He wants to tell the Romans about the importance of mission and the characteristics of mission. Then Paul opens his heart to them about his own past, present and future and his involvement in mission. He humbly asks for their prayers and sends them greetings from friends.

Mission

In verse 14 Paul commends them. It is something of a small diplomatic exaggeration perhaps. He is simply assuring them that he appreciates **all their good qualities**. We need to do the same about the amazing growth of the church among the Chinese and others in Southeast Asia, in Sub-Saharan Africa and in the Latin American countries.

In verse 15 Paul emphasises his unique calling to cross-cultural ministry to the Gentiles. He has done this before in Rom. 1:5; 11:13 and 12:5. For Paul the Roman Empire was the greatest challenge facing the newly born church. In today's world the church faces enormous challenges – especially the malaise of modernity infecting much of the Western world and spreading slowly everywhere. In addition to this there is the fightback of Islam, Hinduism and militant Buddhism.

Then Paul gives us three characteristics of his call to mission. These also should be true of all today's cross-cultural workers from the North and from the Global South.

1. Paul's ministry was a priestly ministry (Rom. 15:16-17)

Our work is a priestly service! This is because we are able to offer up those who believe through the Gospel message as a living sacrifice to God.

As you know, non-Jews were rigorously excluded from the temple in Jerusalem and not allowed to take part in any sacrificial system. But now, through the Gospel, people from all nations and tribes can be "priests" making holy and acceptable offerings to God.

Prior to about 1950 mission was almost exclusively done by Westerners. Believers from the Global South were excluded. But now we see the fulfilment of the promise in Isaiah 66:18-20.

"For I know their works and their thoughts and the time is coming (and I believe it has come now) ***to gather all nations and tongues. They shall come and see my glory! … and from them I will send survivors to the nations that have not heard of My fame or seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers as an offering to the Lord – on horses, in chariots and wagons and on mules and camels."***

So all evangelists are priests who offer new believers to the Lord. There are two major roles for workers – worship and witness – both are priestly duties.

Paul was very grateful for this ministry, ***"Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God."*** (v. 17) I believe there will be many thousands of members of "Global South" churches who would also be so grateful to God for this same ministry.

2. Paul's ministry was a powerful ministry (Rom. 15:18-19)

This is a very powerful and valuable statement of Paul's own ministry in the "hard places" of the world. Twice in verse 18 Paul uses the word **power** – ***"the power of signs and wonders"*** and ***"the power of the Spirit of God"***. My general impression of travelling in China, Korea and Southeast Asia, as well as in Africa and Latin America, is that the believers come from churches where "signs and wonders" and the "power of the Spirit of God" are much more commonly observed than in our churches with their rather "scientific mind-set" that often excludes this power.

There are five features of a "powerful ministry"

- **The objective of ministry** – ***"to bring the Gentiles to obedience".*** It is surprisingly that he doesn't mention **faith** as he did in Rom. 1:6. His emphasis is on obedience – what we call discipleship. It is this obedience that is the indispensable consequence of saving faith. In the 20th century the Western church has often made **conversion** the goal of ministry. The Third World churches can help us to correct this aberration in mission.

- **He refuses to take glory** for his amazing ministry. He only dares to say, ***"What Christ has accomplished through me"***. Sometimes in the New Testament our work is seen as collaboration with God – i.e. ***"We are God's fellow workers"***. (I Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1) But here Paul puts the emphasis not on our partnership with God, but on us as His "tool" – "He used me." "***We are Christ's ambassadors, God making his appeal through us."*** (2. Cor. 5:20 also Acts 15:12 and 21:19)

  One of the tendencies of Western missions is to raise our profile in order to raise funds by exaggerating what "**we** are doing". It is not safe or productive to think this way, for the work is God's work and He must get the glory.

  The Welsh revival of 1906 had an immense impact on South Wales. It started suddenly and after just a few years stopped suddenly. One major leader of the revival wrote later*, "O God, you could have done so much more, if only we had not taken the glory."*

- ***"What Christ has accomplished through me"*** -– by what Paul **said** and by what Paul **did** – by **words** and **deeds** – **words** and **works** – the **verbal** and the **visual**.

  As human beings we often learn most through our eyes and through our ears. Words explain works, but works dramatize words. The public ministry of the Lord Jesus was a wonderful example of this and after His ascension He continues ***"to do and to teach"*** through His people. (Acts 1:1)

  Note that "works" doesn't equate to miracles only. I think one of the most powerful visual aids the Lord Jesus used was when He took a little child into His arms.

  Again my impression is that Global South churches are more conscious of this than many of our Global North leaders who are often more 'cerebral' and 'analytical' than our Global South people who more easily integrate the verbal with the visual – the words with the works. We need these Global South workers on our teams.

- **The ministry of the Lord Jesus through Paul was by words + works + wonders: the Power of Signs**

  We need this same ministry today. Signs are significant for they demonstrate the arrival of God's Kingdom. Wonders evoke people's amazement. In a parallel passage in 2 Cor. 12:12 we read, ***"The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works".***

  So the purpose of signs and miracles is to authenticate the ministry of the worker. At a recent conference in Malaysia I heard a report of what was happening among a Muslim people in the southern part of Africa. The report said that many were turning to faith and also two dead people had been brought to life and many had been healed. The team was made up of African workers. The purpose of "signs and wonders" is to authenticate the message.

  Our Western model of "signs and wonders" is largely 'in-house', but the reality is that it is rare that anything really happens. The reality is, don't bring "signs and wonders" 'in-house' and expect much to happen. But get out on the cutting-edge of God's purposes and the most amazing things happen as we have been witnessing in Algeria.

  So the marks of a true worker (a priest) are not degrees in missiology – like the Old Testament clothes and bells and today's dog collars – but works of power. What a challenge!

- **Paul's ministry was through the power of the Spirit** (v. 19)

  This statement is separated from "signs and wonders" and so it is likely to be different. It isn't only miracles that are the expected marks of a worker. The Holy Spirit also uses His sword – the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). He takes our feeble human words and authenticates and confirms them by His divine power in the minds, hearts, consciences and wills of the hearers.

  Paul said***, "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."*** (1 Cor. 2:4) See also 1 Thess. 1:5. So every conversion is a power encounter in which the Holy Spirit rescues and regenerates lost people.

3. Paul's ministry was a <u>pioneer</u> ministry (Rom. 15:19-22)

" … so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum (south east of Trieste today) ***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."***

Paul is succinct and amazingly modest in summarising ten years of strenuous apostolic work including his three great journeys. He speaks of his impact on urban centres – from Jerusalem to Illyricum (the large mountainous area north-east of the Adriatic Sea now called Dalmatia). There is no account in Acts of Paul's visit to this area, but he could have gone there during the two-year gap between leaving Ephesus and beginning his journey to Jerusalem. (Acts 20:1ff)

So Paul completed the preaching of the Gospel in six whole Roman provinces and the north east of the Roman Empire was evangelised! How? By church-planting in populous and influential cities and leaving churches behind so the local believers could radiate the Gospel into rural areas.

Paul then quotes Is. 52:15, ***"Those who have never been told of Him will see and those who have never heard will understand."*** Paul uses this to validate his particular policy. The context of Isaiah 52 is the mission of the "Servant of the Lord". ***"He shall sprinkle many nations … For that which has not been told them, they see and that which they have not heard, they understand."*** Isaiah then gives a wonderful depiction of the Lord Jesus (Is. 53).

Paul sees this and other Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the Lord Jesus – the true Servant of the Lord. Paul had a passion to pioneer! After a short visit to Rome he hoped to pioneer into the north-western part of the Roman Empire – Spain and Gaul.

How we need people with a passion to pioneer into the various people groups in unreached peoples today! I believe we will find such people in the Global South.

How do we recruit workers?

- When the Lord Jesus saw the multitudes, ***"He was moved with compassion"***. Potential workers/prayers etc. are "caught" by your burden – by you being "moved" by the situation. Do they sense how deeply you are really bothered by the situation? Do they feel the awful tragedy of so many people going to an awful eternity by default?
- Try and find ways to help potential co-workers to visualise the hopelessness and the desperate situation of so many millions who are lost unless workers get residence and live among them. Use all sorts of media tools to demonstrate this.
- Help the prospective recruit to envision how he/she can make a significant contribution and how others on their team can cover their areas of weakness. Explore the policies of having single language teams – i.e. all Spanish, all Korean etc.
- Remind people that not only is missions God's idea, it is God's priority and He has promised to build His church. So this is not an exercise in futility, but a very do-able task!

May God help us to play our part in completing the task of reaching the whole world with the Gospel so that The Lord Jesus will return and usher in the Day of God. (Mt. 24:14 and 2 Pet. 3:11)

When Jesus sent out the 72 He said to them, ***"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field."*** (Luke 10:2)