

THE PRIESTLY DUTY

Romans 15:14-33

Key Verse: 15:16

“...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.”

In the last passage we learned how important it is to have the spirit of unity. When Christians have the spirit of unity they reveal Jesus to the world and glorify God with one heart and mouth. This spirit of unity cannot be attained by human effort. The spirit of unity is the gift of God. The spirit of unity is given to a Christ-centered community. May God give us a spirit of unity among ourselves and enable us to glorify God with one heart and mouth.

We have prayed two by two, in fellowships, and personally for the USA to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Sometimes, however, we don't think deeply about this prayer topic. It means, “May God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” It means, “May Jesus Christ be honored as King and Lord by all people, beginning with us.” And under Jesus' kingship, each of us has a priestly duty to fulfill for the glory of God. In today's passage we find the example of the Apostle Paul. Paul fulfilled his priestly duty. May God help us, also, to understand our priestly duty and to fulfill our priestly duty for the glory of God.

First, the priestly duty is God's amazing grace (14-15).

Look at verse 14. “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” Paul understood the church in Rome. Though he had never visited there, he knew some of the members personally. They were not baby Christians. For example, Priscilla and Aquila were there (16:3). They were Paul’s coworkers in pioneering Corinth and Ephesus. Andronicus and Junias were there. They had been in Christ before Paul was, and Paul recognized them as apostles (16:7). Paul knew that the members of the church in Rome were full of goodness, that is, they had been transformed by the gospel into those who revealed Christ’s goodness in the midst of the evil of the world. They were complete in knowledge, that is, they knew the full gospel message in all its aspects. They were also competent to teach one another. They were Bible teachers and spiritually mature people.

Look at verse 15. “I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me....” Though Paul’s intended audience contained many mature Christians, he did not try to write something new to them. He wrote the simple gospel message with great boldness. It was to remind them of it again. The gospel message is surprisingly simple. Yet it is deeper than the ocean. For example, one person has recited John 3:16 many, many times. At first, he understood through John 3:16 that by believing the gospel message he had eternal life. But recently he came to realize that the key point of John 3:16 is the love of God. When he considered the pain that God bore to give his only Son to sinners, he cried many tears because of the love of God. Dr. Samuel Lee’s last direction for UBF ministry was “back to the Bible.” We must study the Bible diligently, especially the gospel message. Living in this real world, we need to be reminded of the old, old story of the gospel until the kingdom of God comes. Moreover, we must focus our Bible teaching on the good news of the gospel.

The last part of verse 15 says, "...because of the grace God gave me...." Paul became a servant of Jesus Christ with a priestly duty by God's grace alone. At one time, he had been a man of self-righteousness and pride. This drove him to persecute the Christian church. Then he became a demon-possessed man who consented to the murder of holy saints, like Stephen. He was utterly miserable. What is worse, he was the chief enemy of the church of God, and Christ took this personally. In the world of mere men, one who has power to crush his enemy will do so right away. Martin Luther said that if he were God, he would destroy mankind three times a day. The Risen Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth. But he did not crush Paul. The Risen Christ visited Paul and revealed his glory to him. The Risen Christ forgave his sins and gave him peace. The Risen Christ gave him a new life and a holy mission. It was to carry his name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel (Ac 9:15). Paul enjoyed heavenly sunlight in his soul. In fulfilling his mission, Paul became a truly great man in God, and in world history. Usually, very successful people become proud. But Paul always remembered the grace of Jesus who saved him and gave him a holy mission. Paul suffered much to carry out this mission. He was often abused verbally and physically. He was hated by his own people and considered by many as crazy. Yet, he always remembered the grace of Jesus. This grace had two elements: the grace of salvation and the grace of mission. This grace was for the glory of Christ Jesus. We who carry God's mission must remember God's grace and thank God for his grace, even in the midst of suffering.

Second, the priestly duty is to proclaim the gospel (16).

Look at verse 16. "...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." Here Paul tells us that the priestly duty is precisely to proclaim the gospel of God. Gospel means "good news." It is the good news of God's love and salvation for sinners through his Son Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He will come again in great power and glory to judge the living and the dead. Whoever believes in him will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. This salvation begins the moment we believe (Jn 5:24). Jesus liberates us from Satan's domain and gives us the kingdom of God.

Paul says that his priestly duty was to proclaim the gospel of God. Proclaiming is not the same as chatting about. It is announcing with absolute faith and a life-giving spirit that Jesus Christ is the Way and the Truth and the Life—that he is the only way to God. It is to announce that his kingdom has come. Jesus himself began this ministry of proclaiming the gospel. Jesus' message was, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15)

Paul says that proclaiming the gospel is a priestly duty. This refers to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. Priests had many duties. But the outstanding one was to offer sacrifices on the altar for the sins of the people. God accepted these sacrifices and forgave the sins of the Israelites. But these sacrifices were temporary. They looked forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ died once and for all for the sins of the world. Jesus is our Great High Priest. He is constantly interceding for us before the throne of God in heaven. He is the only mediator between God and man. We can all come to God directly through Jesus,

receive the forgiveness of sins, and have fellowship with God. Yet, in his divine wisdom, God appointed people to propagate the gospel throughout the world. Jesus told his disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15,16). When we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of the world, we carry out the priestly duty, just as Paul did.

Paul says he had a priestly “duty,” not a priestly “option.” In Romans 1:5 he said, “Through him and for his name’s sake we have received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.” Jesus’ grace of forgiveness is accompanied by Jesus’ grace of mission to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. Down through the generations, many have tried to claim only the grace of forgiveness and ignore the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel to others. One of the goals of the Reformation was to restore the Biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. At that time, the Roman Catholic Church claimed that ordinary people could only come to God through a Catholic priest. The Reformers stood on the Bible truth that there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Ti 2:5). They taught people to study the Bible for themselves, believe it, and have a personal relationship with God. They also taught believers to carry the gospel message to others.

All Christians have a divine duty as royal priests to spread the gospel—wherever they are, and to whomever they meet. We have been studying 1 Peter in our nightly prayer meetings. It was addressed to God’s elect, scattered through severe persecution to all the provinces of Asia Minor. Many of them had lost their jobs and had to learn new trades or professions in their middle age. Some families had

been split because some members accepted the gospel and some rejected it. In that situation, just to survive and overcome their heartbreak was more than enough. But Peter did not sympathize with them for their sufferings. He taught them: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pe 2:9). Peter wanted them to live as Bible teachers and shepherds for the Gentiles, wherever they were. Here we must realize that God always wants to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth through his people, and he wants to do it now. It is essential for every Christian to fulfill the priestly duty by revealing Christ to the unbelieving world through teaching the word of God and living up to its teaching in their daily lives. UBF has always been a ministry of one-to-one Bible study with full participation of all members. Dr. Joseph Chung has taught the Bible one-to-one to all kinds of people for forty years. Missionary Joshua Hong teaches the word of God to students one-to-one with all his heart. Shepherdess Christy Toh has so many one-to-one Bible students that they line up outside her door waiting for their turn to study. These servants are fulfilling their priestly duty before God. They are truly great and exemplary, and their reward will be great. But we should not just admire them. We must all teach the Bible as our priestly duty.

There is another aspect of the priestly duty. It is to pray. In the Old Testament, the High Priest wore a breastpiece with twelve precious stones on it, each stone representing a tribe of Israel (Ex 28:29). The priest carried the Israelites before God in prayer. Likewise, Christians are to be prayer servants for the peoples of the world. Through intercessory prayer we bring unbelieving people to God. We must pray for unbelieving Americans to come to God. For this, we pray for pioneering 561 American campuses with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must continue to pray

for Muslim countries, North Korea and China. God hears our prayer and God will answer our prayer. Whether we feel like it or not, we have a priestly duty to pray to God for all peoples.

No one can change another person. We cannot even change ourselves. But when we teach the word of God to others, the Holy Spirit comes to them and sanctifies them by his power. We must bear with one another and bear with our Bible students patiently. They will be transformed by the Holy Spirit into holy children of God who can please God with their lives of faith. Shepherd Adam Kramarczyk was once a typical young American suburbanite. He was associated with television and the couch. Then God called him to a new life through one-to-one Bible study with Missionary David Kim. Later, Dr. James Joung became his Bible teacher. Through them the word of God worked in Adam and the power of the Holy Spirit has been changing him day by day. He is becoming a hardworking man of God. He has diligently taken care of group Bible study assignments for the upcoming international conference at MSU. When we teach the word of God faithfully and prayerfully, the USA will become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Third, a priest must glorify God alone (17-19a).

Look at verses 17-18. “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....” Paul had been a mighty instrument of God’s power. Through him, God changed individual lives and evangelized the entire area from Jerusalem to the Italian peninsula. Many people looked at Paul as if he were a kind of god, and once he was worshiped as the Greek god Hermes by the people of Lystra (Ac 14:12). But Paul strongly

rejected the praise that belonged to God alone. Paul always pointed people to Jesus and gave glory to God. Many servants of God want to share God's glory fifty-fifty. God knows their hidden motive and does not bless their work. To be a fruitful priest in God's work we must have a deep desire to glorify God alone. May God help us to repent and give glory to God alone.

Fourth, the priestly duty is worldwide in scope (19b-24).

In verse 16, Paul said his priestly duty was to the Gentiles. The Gentiles refers to everyone who was not a Jew. It meant to the people of the whole world. Thus, Paul's duty was in line with the world mission command to preach the gospel to the whole creation. Look at verse 19. "So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ." Paul's commitment to the worldwide priestly duty is indeed exemplary. Through three missionary journeys he pioneered four churches in Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe), three churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea), and a church in Achaia (Corinth), and laid the groundwork for a tremendous ministry in Asia Minor through the city of Ephesus. At the time he wrote this letter, his plan was to go to Spain, which was considered to be the end of the earth. He wanted to drop by Rome on the way and share his world mission vision with the Roman Christians. He wanted to encourage them to spread the gospel to the whole world through Roman roads. It seems that Paul would singlehandedly bring the gospel to all the Gentiles of his time. Priests are not nationalistic, but serve the whole world mission purpose of God.

Fifth, priests carry out a ministry of reconciliation (25-33).

Before going to Spain or Rome, Paul had a very important task to finish. It was to go to Jerusalem and deliver an offering from the Gentile churches to the saints in Jerusalem who were in an adverse situation. His purpose in doing this is explained in verses 26-27, which say, “For Macedonia and Achaia (Gentile churches) 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.” This offering was not just a relief offering. It was Paul’s prayer to unify Gentile and Jewish believers for the glory of God. Paul hoped that Jewish believers would recognize God’s work among the Gentiles and accept them as brothers from their hearts. Ultimately, Paul wanted to plant world mission vision in Jewish believers. At the same time, Paul wanted the Gentile believers to acknowledge their tremendous debt to the Jews. Through the Jews the history of God had flowed for two thousand years. Through the Jews the Messiah came. Through the Jews the gospel had spread to the whole world. The Gentiles had done nothing to gain God’s great favor and they had a danger of taking it too lightly. Paul wanted them to realize how blessed they were through the Jews. He hoped that through mutual understanding and recognition of God’s work, both Jew and Gentile would become one in the work and history of God. For this, Paul was willing to give his life (Ac 21:13). Here we learn that the priestly duty includes the ministry of reconciliation which is indeed costly.

Look at verses 30-32. Here Paul asks the Roman Christians to join his struggle by praying to God for him. He prayed to be rescued from the unbelievers in Jerusalem and that his service would be acceptable to the saints there. Paul knew the danger he was facing. He did not have any illusions about what awaited him in Jerusalem. So he asked for prayer support. At the same time, he had the peace of God in his

heart. He was optimistic that his ministry would be successful by God's help. So he ends with the words, "The God of peace be with you all. Amen" (33).

Let's read verse 16 together again. "...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." When Paul said he had a priestly duty, he saw himself in God's history, fulfilling God's world salvation purpose to make his people a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It was true that most of Israel had rejected Christ and the nation failed to fulfill her priestly duty. But through one person Paul, this duty was being carried out fruitfully.

In today's passage we learned the priestly duty from St. Paul. Like Paul, we must see ourselves in light of God's hope and mission. We are priests in the sight of God, who have a priestly duty to proclaim the gospel to the people of all nations. May God richly bless you to understand and carry out this priestly duty.