

**Romans 15:20, 24, 30**  
**(Isaiah 49:6; John 10:14-16)**  
**“How Are They to Hear?”**

## **Introduction**

I had the privilege of spending the last week and-a-half in northern India, ministering alongside friends whom God is using to reach regions of the country historically unresponsive to the gospel. Last Sunday, I preached the English service in Delhi Cathedral, and then worshiped with another dynamic evangelical congregation pastored by an old friend of mine, whom I met in Delhi twelve years ago when he was beginning his ministry. Sunday evening, I met with a group of Indian leaders who had attended the Lausanne Conference in Cape Town, and then spent last week teaching the Bible to over 100 Indian church-planters ministering in the most resistant areas of the country. And I found myself, over the past week and-a-half, reintroduced at ground level to the kind of apostolic ministry described by Paul in Romans 15.

We have noted before that the Bible is essentially about God on mission. God made us in his image for intimate, loving friendship with him and with each other, but we ran from him and from one another and sought to be our own lords and masters. Yet in mercy and love, God set out to find us and – at great cost to himself – to lead us back home to his heart, and to restore our relationship with him and with each other. And he has entrusted to us, his people, the mission of making the gospel known to every ethnic group, every language and culture on earth. In Jesus’ own words, “Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

So, before we leave our study of this fifteenth chapter, in the light of our recent annual celebration of global mission, as we consider and plan our part this coming year in God’s great mission to the nations, I want to focus on three crucial aspects of biblical mission found here in Paul’s description of his own ministry. First, I’ll underscore these three essential elements as Paul notes them, and then provide contemporary examples from India of these key elements.

## **Body**

### **1. Three biblical priorities in pursuing global mission:**

#### ***Pursuing a biblical pattern of mission (15:20):***

*Our primary focus in mission must be on reaching those as yet unreached.*  
Other ministries are important and good in providing support for existing churches and ministries as they present the gospel to their own communities, make disciples who worship together, grow together through fellowship in

the word and prayer, and minister within their surrounding culture. But the missional focus of all such existing ministries, and our focus as well, should be on those people who are as yet beyond the reach of the gospel. Or else, as Paul said earlier in chapter 10, how can they call on the name of the Lord and be saved unless they know who he is and what he has done for them? And how will they hear unless someone is sent to proclaim to them the good news of God's grace?

Yet, tragically, the vast majority of support given toward global mission goes to established ministries that are doing the good work of building up God's people, but are not pursuing the crucial, apostolic mission of reaching those as yet unreached by the gospel.

***Developing a biblical pattern of partnership (15:24):***

*Note, secondly, that Paul sought what we in the west like to call "strategic partnerships" in pursuing the ministry entrusted to him. It is quite clear that he hoped to establish a supportive relationship with the Christians in Rome so that he would be refreshed and encouraged when with them, and then helped and supported by them as he sought to open a new field of ministry in Spain.*

This is what we, as a congregation, should offer to those who seek partnership with us, and what we should seek for ourselves in every part of the world where we hope to engage. We should not go blundering off into new areas of the world without seeking out churches that are geographically and culturally closer to those new areas than we are, in order to labor along side them, to listen to and learn from them, and to offer whatever gifts or resources we might have that would enable the new work to go forward. Mission should never merely be about expanding our group or denomination, but rather about extending the kingdom of God.

***Practicing a biblical pattern of prayer (15:30):***

*Paul knew that powerful, persistent, concerted prayer was needed to open closed doors, set captives free, and prepare the way for gospel. Prayer is like the air support in a military invasion. Just as heavy bombing disorients and weakens the enemy and prepares the way for the ground troops, so too concerted prayer breaks Satan's hold on the hearts of minds of those who have formerly resisted the gospel, and opens the door for the gospel to do its work. And so Paul asked the Christians in Rome, "strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf" (15:30).*

Do we know what that means? Have we ever spent the night, or even an hour, on our knees, crying out to God on behalf of the things that are most on the heart of God?

## **2. These priorities in action:**

While Paul presented these in logical sequence, in practice these are pursued in reverse order. I will simply provide a few examples from India of work being done in north India along the exact pattern described here by Paul.

### ***A movement of prayer for the nation:***

Over the years, God has stirred the hearts of his people in India to realize that without deep, concerted, prevailing prayer, India will not receive the gospel of Christ. A few examples: At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American Presbyterian missionary, John Hyde, started a prayer movement in the Punjab that resulted in a great revival and thousands of Indians being converted. Indian evangelical leader, Samuel Kamaleson, once described to me how, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, he and two close friends went to a mountaintop and cried out to God to give them India for the sake of the gospel. From that prayer meeting came such evangelical Indian missions as the Friends Missionary Prayer Band that has planted thousands of churches among India's poor.

More recently, a new prayer movement has spread throughout all of India, lead by a former officer in the Indian Air Force, who was wonderfully converted after a dissolute life had left him physically sick and emotionally wrecked. The Lord healed his body, set him free in Christ, and gave him a vision of India transformed by prayer. Now, a network of Christians around the country cry out to God day and night for the salvation of India, and God is answering those prayers in astonishing ways. In response to prayer-walking through the most difficult and resistant areas of India, the Spirit is now opening formerly resistant villages to the gospel of grace.

### ***A movement of partnerships in pursuit of the mission:***

Rather than seeking to build their own little kingdoms, those who are part of this all-India prayer network are partnering together to reach areas formerly resistant to the gospel. They know that the mission is too vast for any one group to accomplish. And so they make their research and resources available to one another for the sake of the kingdom.

### ***A movement of church planting among the unreached:***

The statistics of both the needs and the God-given results are staggering: Here are three illustrations of groups that I met and work that I sampled. They must remain unnamed, as they have asked, because they are working in dangerously resistant areas, and because they do not want to grieve the Holy Spirit by drawing attention to themselves:

- An Indian neurologist with a flourishing practice in London walked away from his practice in order to return to India and rehabilitate a hospital servicing poor villages in a strongly Hindu area, an area dangerously hostile to Christians. He has been assaulted by angry mobs and threatened with further trouble, yet over the past decade he has persisted. He and his team have not only kept the hospital going with crucial care to the poor of the area, but over the past five years have established over 100 schools, recruited and trained over 300 teachers, planted over 1,200 churches, and baptized over 8,000 new believers. *Compare that with how little we and other affluent, free churches in the west have done over the past five years!*
- Another Indian mission that partners with him, throughout northern India, has planted 6,442 churches, baptized 33,107 new believers, established seven training centers that have trained 18,667 leaders for the new churches.
- Yet another of their partner organizations – one that works closely with the first two but focuses on perhaps the most spiritually strategic and resistant part of India, Uttar Pradesh, has a goal of training and equipping 100,000 disciples who will disciple the next generation to plant one million new churches – saw the following results just in this past year of 2011: 34,118 previously unreached villages were reached with the gospel, 10,293 house churches were planted, 54,347 new believers were baptized and 49,456 leaders trained.

In each case, the biblical model is clear: a vision of reaching those as yet unreached by the gospel, and not merely evangelizing them, but discipling them and raising up – training and equipping – a new generation of leaders for the churches. Seeking partnerships where resources are shared, encouragement offered, and the body of Christ throughout India built up. And all is prepared for and sustained through concerted, intentional, costly, prevailing prayer.

## **Conclusion**

We American Christians have resources and freedom of access and travel at our disposal above and beyond any other group of Christians at any time or place in history. And yet, how tragically little we see God do in comparison with those who have cast themselves, their lives and resources, upon the grace and power of God.

May God in his great mercy stir us to action, as never before, as we recommit ourselves to the mission entrusted to us by our great God and King, and with prevailing prayer for our nation and for the world, respond to the call of the great mission hymn, “O Zion Haste”: “Give of your sons to bear the message glorious / give

of your selves to speed them on their way / pour out yourselves for them in prayer  
victorious / and all your spending, Jesus will repay.”

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