

Romans 1:8-15
(Ecclesiastes 4:9-14; Luke 6:12-16)
“Discovering God-Ordained Partners”

Introduction

As we began to study this great letter last Sunday, we heard Paul answering three of the most basic and crucial questions that any person can ask: Who am I? What has been entrusted to me? What is my mission? We suggested the answers that Paul gives are essentially the same answers that each of us should be able to give if we are serious about following Jesus and living life to the full.

Paul’s answer to the final question (What is my mission?) involved three dimensions: the personal, the global and the relational dimensions. At the personal level, Paul reminded us that we ourselves must respond to the treasure of the gospel of grace that has entrusted to us, and be transformed by it, before we can carry it to others. As the gospel transforms us, we become passionately concerned about the global dimension, the church’s great mission, “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of [Christ’s] name among all the nations.” However, this must translate to a relational dimension as we establish connections with those with whom we will partner in the unique part of that global mission entrusted to us.

And this is at the heart of Paul’s concern in writing this letter. After he carries a gift from the Gentile churches to their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, Paul wants to travel to Spain where the gospel has not yet been preached. But on his way to Spain, he intends to stop and establish a partnership with Roman Christians so that they can help him in his mission to Spain and the rest of Europe. If we miss this missional element, we will miss the drive and force of this letter. Paul is looking for partners in ministry and mission, and in this morning’s text we have the opportunity to observe and to learn from a master at forming partnerships.

But what does this have to do with you? Everything! As we saw last Sunday, when Christ calls us, he calls us into intimate relationship with him so that he can send us out with the treasure of the gospel. We are no longer our own simply to do as we like. We belong to the Lord, who has called us out of isolation and individualism, and into his new community, the church, the body of Christ. We are no more able to pursue our calling on our own than the foot can do the work of the foot apart from the ankle, the leg and the rest of the body. This is elementary: Christ-following 101.

And yet, too often we simply drift into partnerships without taking the care that Paul exhibits here, whether we are considering the most important partnership of our life, if we are married, or are considering partnerships that will help us to do the work that Christ has entrusted to us, such as carrying the gospel into our profession, or into our neighborhood, or into a cross-cultural setting where Christ has called us to serve.

The question I am asking is this: What should we be looking for if we would establish godly relationships, God-ordained partnerships for the sake of the gospel?

Body

- 1. Seek partners who have a reputation for faithfulness (1:8).**
- 2. Seek partners through whole-hearted service and unceasing prayer (1:9-10).**
- 3. Seek partners with a view toward equality and mutuality (1:11-12).**
- 4. Seek partners in humble submission to God's timing (1:13).**

Conclusion

Finally, remember that it is all for the sake of the gospel (1:14-15). When we have received the gospel, we are under obligation to pass it on. It is a treasure that turns to dust if we try to hoard it. It only retains its value if we pass it on. Have you yet been captured by grace and captivated by what has been entrusted to you? Have you yet realized that you and I are God's only strategy for seeking and saving the lost, for reaching those from every tribe, tongue, people and nation? What are you giving your life to? Is it worth your life? Take up the mission. Seek godly partners. Don't be ashamed of the gospel!

© John M. Wood, all rights reserved