

A Pastor's Offering to God of Holy People

by John Piper

Paul's ministry goal is to boast in Christ and his work through him to prepare an offering holy and obedient for God.

Duration: 37:41

Scripture: Romans 15:14-18

Topics: "Pastoral Ministry", "Sanctification"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of pastors exalting and boasting in Christ's work through them to prepare a holy and obedient people for God. It highlights the need for pastors to rely on God's grace and the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work. Surprisingly, the congregation is also called to exhort, instruct, and admonish one another, showing the collaborative effort in building up the church.

Transcript

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has worked through me to bring about the obedience of this people and therefore again Lord I renounce all reliance upon myself my preparation and I ask for you to come the living Christ who has all authority in heaven and on earth and by your Holy Spirit draws near and does wonders in the hearts of your people come so that there would be an obedient and acceptable a sanctified people readied to be offered up to you pray for the pastors gathered with us in these services that they would be enabled by their presence here and by their presence at the conference to prepare a people obedient and sanctified to offer up to God as their crown of boasting their joy their hope so Lord come and do these great things among us now I ask in

Jesus powerful and merciful name amen well there are a lot of pastors coming and quite a few come early and come to these services Sunday morning and this evening and therefore I reflected on whether I should press on in Romans or not we've been in Romans for eight years now and I don't only have a few more Sundays before I go on sabbatical and I thought well we should just wait and pick it up in August but then I look at this text I thought nope this text is so well suited for these pastors I think I'll stay here for another Sunday or two so that's the reason for picking up what we're going to focus on namely verses 14 to 18 even though I ask that the larger text be read what we see in 14 to 18 of Romans 15 is Paul's ministry goal and I think it's a good ministry goal for all of us

pastors and you will find if you're sitting there saying oh my he's going to talk to the pastors what about me this text will have or this sermon will have a surprise ending it surprised me and so it's a lay people ending

in a pastor's sermon and so just hold your breath for about 35 minutes or whatever we have here and and you will be included and then if you think the rest of it isn't for you you're wrong you need to pray hard for your pastors that these things happen the main statement in this text I believe is found in verse 17 stating his goal and ours so let's look at verse 17 in Christ Jesus then or therefore basing that on something that's gone before in Christ Jesus then I have reason to be proud or boast of my work for God now what I mean by calling that the main statement in

these verses 14 to 18 is that everything else supports it and it doesn't support anything we need to see that and I'll show you to you this way first of all notice that in it is the word therefore or then in Christ Jesus then because something is true then or therefore this follows and so it's supported by what goes before and then look at verse 18 following it begins with the word for starting with verse 17 in Jesus Christ in Christ Jesus then I have reason to be proud of my work for God for I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me so verse 18 starting with that word because or for is supporting arguing for validating what went before in verse 17 so what comes before it is leading to it and what comes after it is supporting it and therefore

verse 17 is standing there as the as the apex of the main as the main point of this text so what is it saying what's verse 17 saying in Christ Jesus then I have reason to be proud or boast of my work for God now the point of that verse is not simply that Paul has a boast or has something to be proud of the point is that he has something to be proud of in Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ I have this reason to boast or be proud of the things that I'm doing for God or the things that relate to God it's a very difficult phrase to translate now that's really crucial to see that it's in Jesus Christ that he has this boast and it's crucial for two reasons one boasting is simple if it's in me and not in Jesus Paul said 2nd Corinthians 10:17 let the one who boasts boast in the Lord Galatians 6:14 far be

it from me that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ Romans 3:27 what becomes of boasting it is excluded so it's really crucial that whenever he undertakes to say I'm boasting we hear some very important Christ exalting qualifiers like in Jesus Christ I have a boast in my work you probe that word in Jesus Christ I have reason for boasting because boasting is so simple pastors this is not just a matter of words it won't do to have a boastful spirit coming out sideways in how often you invite this person to your church and often you go to speak here and how big your church is and how fast it's growing it's kind of coming out in all kinds of ways and then you sing to God be the glory at the end of the service people see right through that this is a heart issue first

because if it's wrong here it's going to come out I was on an email with a friend this week and he was burdened by a well-known pastor and he sent me the last five first sentences of his blog which are all about self self self self and he's concerned he said John talk to this guy so lay people is this relevant for you is it is it important that you be this way if not you know what he is then at least pray for this pastor and the pastors are coming here so that our hearts are an in Christ Jesus in Christ Jesus all that I am all that I have all that I want is in Christ Jesus and guard me from the slippery side comments just call a little bit of attention to me oh how subtle pride is so first reason why we need to stress this little phrase in verse 17 in Christ Jesus is because boasting is

just so evil when it's not in Christ Jesus and the second reason that we need to stress this is that the whole passage 14 to 18 is founded on the truth that God graciously works through people so that our ministry prosperity or not is owing to God and not to us what really matters in a church is owing to God that's not owing to God it doesn't matter so we need to keep that phrase firmly before us so Paul's goal and our goal

as pastors should be to boast in Christ Jesus in all of our work or to say it another way we should aim to do our work in such a way that Christ gets the glory or 17 again in Christ Jesus then I have reason to be proud of my work for God means Christ has worked in such a way in me and for me and through me that my work has become his work and my boast in it is my boast

in him that's our goal now having said that from verse 17 it's way too general so our goal is to boast in Christ in the way he's worked in us and for us and through us to enable us to do our work so that it becomes his work is way too general and so now we look backward and forward to let the generality be given a very precise biblical focus go back to verse 16 forward to verse 18 and see the concrete form that this boast this work takes I think there's a goal stated in verse 16 a goal stated in verse 18 and I think they're the same goal let's see if you see that let's start with verses 15 and 16 but on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given to me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the

gospel so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable sanctified by the Holy Spirit so what's his goal in those verses his goal is to offer the Gentiles to God as an acceptable sanctified offering that's his goal everything else is leading to that I want Lord to so minister the gospel I want to be such a minister of Christ that I have an offering to lay before you at the last day namely a people a people holy acceptable sanctified by the Holy Spirit now that's verse 16 let's go to verse 18 and see the goal here for I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring about the to bring the Gentiles to obedience so here his goal is to bring the Gentiles to obey Christ he believed that his ministry was an instrument in the hands of Christ

to bring about an obedient people now how do those two goals relate to each other for 16 the goal is a people who are acceptable sanctified by the Holy Spirit verse 18 the goal is a people obedient to God through Jesus Christ I think they're identical I think they're the same goal a sanctified people worked upon by the Holy Spirit through Paul or an obedient people worked upon through Jesus Christ by Paul same goal stated in two different ways a holy people and obedient people a people conformed to the will of God a people conformed to the holiness of God so now we have clarity for verse 17's goal it's not just vaguely do all my work in such a way that Christ gets the glory there's a very specific point on the work that he is referring to and it is this Paul's crowning experience is

exalting or boasting in Christ and in his work through Paul to prepare an offering holy and obedient for God that's the goal of his life his crowning goal is to boast or exalt in Christ and the work of Christ through him to bring about an obedient sanctified offering up to God that's his goal and I think it should be the goal of every pastor in this room our aim as pastors is to exalt in Christ and his work through us to prepare for God an offering of a holy and obedient people now you might ask why don't you just say don't you just simplify and say our aim is to prepare for God a holy and obedient people our aim is to prepare for God a holy and obedient people why don't you say it simply like that instead of that long complicated sentence you just used and there are two reasons two

answers to that question one is this whole passage is built on the fundamental truth that God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are working through us to bring about the holiness and obedience of God's people we need to say that in our goal we need to say the most fundamental the most fundamental truth in this text not the main point supported by everything but the most fundamental truth in this text is Christ the Holy Spirit and God are working through human agents to bring about this phenomenal reality of an obedient people a sanctified people therefore we have to state our goals in terms of the most fundamental reality

we want to so pray and so live and so preach and so minister the gospel as priests to God that we are used we are instruments in the bringing about of a holy and obedient

people that's the first reason I say it the way I say it the other reason I include the word boasting I'll say this again now every pastor should join Paul in the goal of exalting boasting in what Christ has done and who Christ is so that through us a people are assembled who are holy and obedient to Christ and the boasting is part of the goal why do I insist on that I'll tell you why to watch a people grow in radical obedience to Jesus to watch them fall out of love with the world and into love with Christ to watch them and see them seek the kingdom of God first and let goods and kindred go this mortal life also to watch them become bold in their witness to watch a people become compassionate to the poor and respectful toward ethnic diversity to watch them become devoted young and

old to sexual purity and become committed to world evangelization in a wartime lifestyle that maximizes resources for the cause of magnifying Christ among the nations to see all of that happen through our ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ is the greatest thing that can happen to a pastor and shall we then state our goal so as to exclude the emotion that must have Christ the Father the Spirit will not be honored if you say your goal is to assemble an obedient transformed people and feel nothing if there's no exaltation if there's no boast if there's no thrill that God is at work in the church you go to a conference or get on your face or resign God is not honored by mere performance of proper goals without proper affections so verse 17 is not stated in terms of

mere facts when I say it's the main point I don't mean it says in Christ Jesus then my work has been fruitful it's not what it says it does not say in Christ Jesus my work has been fruitful it says I glory I boast I exult in Christ Jesus that my work has been fruitful and this happens again and again and again in this man's life he lets just enough of himself show chapter 1 chapter 15 so that we can get some glimpse into what the heart of a pastor ought to be what he says is in Christ Jesus then I have reason to be proud in Christ Jesus then I have a boast in Christ Jesus then I exult I boast in my work in the glory of God God will not be honored in our work if we are not thrilled by his glorious work through us so now let's turn to that foundational truth I said it was foundational

is running all through this passage what's the foundational truth namely that in all our work God is the one who is at work that's over and over and over again in this passage I want you to see it in in at least four places first verse 18 we're going to go backward and in going backward I'm moving toward the end and in going backward we're going to end with the surprise conclusion about the lay people number 18 I will not venture verse 18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience the only thing Paul will talk about is what Christ did through him so notice two things to get the truth the fundamental truth that runs right underneath this text all the way along is Paul works Paul works Paul works and when he's

done working says first Corinthians 15 10 it was not I but the grace of God that was with me or here I won't venture to speak except of what Christ has worked Romans 11 36 from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory let that be the banner over every ministry everything is coming from him everything's being brought through him everything's going back to him that's why he gets all the glory Paul loves this truth it's here everywhere so verse 18 in all of our work to prepare an offering for God that's obedient and holy God is at work Christ is at work now verse 16 jump over the main point to some more support here verse 16 you see at the end of that verse this phrase sanctified this people we're gonna offer up to God sanctified by the Holy Spirit that means that the

Holy Spirit is the decisive cause in the holiness of the people if the people become holy at all if they are set apart for God and become pure and humble and righteous and loving and kind and meek and faithful and full of self-control that's God's work that's the Holy Spirit doing that the Lord is preparing a people for the Lord you thought you were preparing the people you are but the Lord is preparing a people for the Lord you find that in so many places think of think of Ephesians 5 who's making this bride ready who's ironing her garments who's washing her who's making her radiant the bridegroom is he's totally indulgent in himself to make a church fit for his enjoyment forever and he's doing it here by his spirit so Paul's instrumentality is seen back up a little earlier in the verse

you see that phrase the priestly service of the gospel of God so that the Gentiles will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit that's odd not an odd way to talk I'm doing my priestly ministry so that they will be sanctified by me no by the Spirit so what's the connection I'm doing my priestly gospel ministry so that they will be sanctified not by me well then why are you doing it the answer is the Holy Spirit is sent into the world to magnify Jesus Christ precisely when he's lifted up in the gospel the Holy Spirit does zero sanctifying work apart from the gospel nothing our job as pastors is to take the gospel and preach it and teach it and pray it and live it and apply it because when the Holy Spirit watches Jesus crucified and risen being lifted up in people's lives for all their very needs

he moves on them with power and they get changed it's called sanctification by the Spirit but he will not move where the gospel is not known it's why missions is important so I faithful gospel preaching is important it's why your testimony at the office in the name of Jesus is important because the Holy Spirit sanctifies when we do our work so again this is the second time we've seen it now verse 18 and now here in all of our work to prepare an offering for God God is the one who's at work now let's go to verse 15 but on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given to me by God now what's Paul doing here he's saying I've invested a lot of time a lot of work a lot of thought and a lot of prayer in writing this book to you that's my job and

I've done it and as soon as that's out of his mouth just the way he's wired as soon as that's out of his mouth he's qualifying and I'm doing it not in my own strength not my own truth by the grace of God I have this ministry I have this calling I have this epistle writing injunction I have it straight from the grace of God you say it back in 1 5 you say it here again I have this from the grace of God I'm not acting on my own initiative I'm not acting out of my own mind out of my own will I am a totally submitted being to the grace of God which is an Emily enabling me to do what I have to do here and so for the third time we see now in all of our work whether it's letter writing preaching to prepare a people for God it is God who is at work and now finally verse 14 here comes the surprise

I myself am satisfied about you my brothers that you yourselves are full of goodness filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another now that may look disconnected from all this other stuff because it might look just like kind of a psychological I've written a long hard letter to you it isn't because I think you're stupid or foolish or empty-headed it's kind of a covering for himself here a lot of the commentaries kind of give it that twist like Paul doesn't want them to think I wrote to you because I think you're dumb it has that effect that's okay for it to have that effect that's not the main thing that's going on in verse 14 what is going on in verse 14 he says you're full of goodness he says they're filled with knowledge so my question is if they're full of goodness and

they're filled with knowledge why do they need to be instructed or admonished the verse says I myself am satisfied about you my brothers that you yourselves are full of goodness filled with all knowledge and able

to instruct one another or literally admonish one another so if you're full which is it Paul are they full of knowledge and full of goodness or do they need somebody to get in their face with some admonition and instruction to help them get more full of knowledge and goodness you sound confused I think Paul would say something like this if we if we had the nerve to say that to him I think he would say since he's a patient man you can tell by what I have written that fullness does not mean perfection because then you're right they would have no need of anybody to instruct them or

admonish them what fullness means Piper what fullness means is that God has given you abundant goodness and abundant knowledge to the point where you can pour out and overflow with admonitions and exhortations and instructions and warnings and encouragements to each other so that where one is lacking the other overflowing will supply and when another is full and overflowing can supply with what is lacking and in all of this you do it with the fullness that God himself provides and just see the previous verse to see the pointer to that may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope I'm satisfied about you that you're full where'd that fullness come from it came from God where's it going to it's going to people

who need ministry through a human being now here's the surprise was to me as I thought about this and where this sermon was going and decided where it should end the surprise thing is that in a sermon for pastors who get their goal by saying our job is to so exalt and boast in Christ and his work in us and through us that we by his grace might prepare a people who are holy and sanctified and obedient to offer up to God we end by realizing in verse 14 God said the people are to make themselves holy the people are to exhort each other the people are to instruct each other the people are to admonish each other verse 14 has intruded upon our province here this is no surprise to any biblical pastor which means now that we need to go back and tweak our goal doesn't it if verse 14 is saying to

all of you lay people there is a Holy Spirit wrought fullness of knowledge and fullness of goodness that is meant to spill over onto each other doesn't mean perfect just there are times when you are full and others are not and they are full and you're not and it's got a spill over onto each other so that the body builds up the body then pastors become what they are in Romans I mean in Ephesians 4 11 I'll put it like this our goal is to so boast and so exalt in Christ and what he's done for us and in us and through us that we are enabled to equip people with holiness and obedience so that they are engaged in exhorting warning encouraging instructing each other it's an amazing thing what God has ordained for the church to be we are to help our people prepare each other for an offering the

offering has three agents you could say one and most decisively God the Spirit Christ the Father working on them the second is the pastor Paul in this case who in the priestly ministry the gospel is working to build the people in knowledge and holiness and the third is that the people equipped begin to work on each other we love the small group ministry of this church it is not an add-on ministry it is an essential ministry where does this one another kind of ministry happen is a absolutely crucial question and underneath all of that goal lies this great truth that we've seen four times now our work to prepare a people holy and obedient is God's work in and through us from him and through him and to him are all things in the church father I thank you so much for the Apostle Paul I love

him I want very much to be devoted the way he was devoted to you I want not to speak of anything except what Christ has worked in order that in everything Christ might get the glory we pastors in this room in fact if you're a pastor I know that you're watching this Sunday morning and tonight let's just all stand pastor associate pastors just stand with me if you're here in that regard the pastors conference father for these

brothers that are standing around the room both in the morning there and here I thank you and I ask that you make this conference rich for them and I pray that you'd help them to exalt boast in you and all that you are for them and that you would work through them and their people so that they might present a people holy and obedient to you by Christ by the spirit by

your agency I ask this through Jesus Christ

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