

Title: Filled with Goodness and Knowledge

Biblical Text: Romans 15:14-17

Teaching Series: Justified by Love

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Preacher: Jason C. Helveston

Romans 15:14-17

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. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.

Perhaps you've noticed, as we're winding down our study of Romans, Paul has been getting a bit nostalgic. He's been reflecting on the big picture of his letter and even some of the major themes of the Old Testament. Like a good teacher, he's reaching back to the beginning of his address as he brings everything to a conclusion. As he's doing so, he's addressing a deep fear of any group that's receiving instruction from someone at a retreat, conference, meeting, event, or, in this case, an apostolic letter. *What's the fear? That we don't have what it takes. What are we going to do after this? When we get back to the real world? When we get back to life and down from this mountain of high enthusiasm and clarity?*

Paul addresses this fear today with kind words and reminders. He's going to tell them *in Christ, everything you need you already have*. In other words, you do have what it takes. That's what I want to talk about today. Through Paul's gospel encouragement, I want to encourage you. Through Paul's gospel instruction, I want to remind you. Through Paul's explanation of gospel growth, I want to help us see what growth really looks like for us as a community. I want us all to see that in Christ, everything we need we already have.

So, that's how we'll organize our time ...

- Gospel *encouragement*.
- Gospel *instruction*.
- Gospel *growth*.

[Prayer]

Movement 1: Gospel Encouragement (v.14, Romans 1:8, James 2:17)

Paul gets a bit introspective. After a long and theologically dense letter, it's as if he settles into a more personal tone. It's something that will carry through the remainder of the letter. To be sure this isn't the first time. Back in the first chapter, Paul communicated his deep affection and appreciation for the faithfulness of Roman Christians. *Read Romans 1:8 ... First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.* Even though he had yet to visit Rome, he knew about and was grateful for the spiritual

reputation of his brothers and sisters there. Through his co-workers, like Prisca and Aquila, he had heard wonderful reports about their community.

Here in chapter 15, Paul gets more specific. Look at v.14. ***Read Romans 15:14 ... 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.*** Notice, he says *I'm satisfied about you*. It's an odd phrasing in English, but he's communicating his confidence in them. He's convinced of their character and quality as people, as followers of Jesus. Like a good big brother, he's saying *I'm proud of you. You're doing great. Keep up the good work.*

In particular Paul is confident in their faith because it's expressed. This is vital for our understanding of what we'll simply call gospel ***encouragement***. In the same way that the Apostle James explains that, ***Read James 2:17 ... "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead,"*** Paul isn't convinced of the Romans' faithfulness because of some bland religious affinity. Rather he's satisfied because they're family, his brothers and sisters, and they're living with faith in a really challenging environment. Emotionalism or spiritual sentimentality is not his cause for confidence. He's encouraged by spiritual fruit. That's the foundation of gospel ***encouragement***. Gospel encouragement is about identifying and sharing the specific ways God is bringing about his purposes and character in our brothers and sisters.

Paul names three things he's encouraged by:

- He's encouraged because they're *full of goodness* (v.14). That means these Roman Christians are kind, generous, and upright in their dealings with other people. Paul names their goodness.
- He's also encouraged because they're *filled with all knowledge* (v.14). In pairing their goodness with knowledge, Paul is highlighting the fact that their kindness toward others is not simply about their behavior. It's about their understanding and beliefs. Godly thinking, Paul says, results in godly living. In this case, because of their knowledge of salvation history and the particulars of the gospel message, they know the goodness of God through Christ and therefore live with goodness. Paul names their knowledge.
- Finally he's encouraged because they're *able to instruct one another* (v.14). Okay, so not only are Roman Christians living with goodness and knowledge, but they are imparting their behavior and understanding to their community. They aren't just keeping their nose clean, they're encouraging their brothers and sisters to walk in obedience and treat others with kindness. They aren't become puffed up on their own good thinking and theology, their sharing the wisdom God has entrusted to them. Paul names their instruction.

Paul's tender affection and clear encouragement got me thinking about you this week. I've seen in you, our church family, the same evidence of faith through your goodness, knowledge, and instruction.

- I've prayed with some of you the past couple weeks as you've wrestled with walking with integrity and love in your work, despite the significant pressure to pursue the bottom line. I've watched as group members have received one

another in brokenness, incompleteness, weakness, doubt, anger, and defensiveness. I've heard stories of forgiveness with spouses and patience with extended family and talking through our feasibility survey, just this week, and how God has brought clarity and peace where there was confusion and tension. Church, you are full of goodness.

- In team meetings recently I've marveled as individuals have articulated the power of biblical community ... the character of God ... the particulars of the gospel ... our calling in this part of the city ... the unique Christian perspective on tedious social issues. You know God's Word. You love God's Word. You are living out God's Word. Church, you are full of knowledge.
- Group leaders, you are a gift. I'm so impressed with the ownership, love, time, aptitude, and wisdom of our sisters and brothers who serve as primary disciples in our church. Nearly all of group leaders have no formal biblical training yet they are taking what they're learning and imparting that to you with incredible accuracy and humility. I see the same thing with our parents who are discipling their children in ways they were never disciplined at that age. Church, you are instructing one another.

As Paul wanted his readers to know, I want you to know I see God's hand in your life ... your faith brings me a genuine confidence that God is building us into the church family he's desires for us to be. That's why we can be encouraged we've got what it takes. In Christ, we've got goodness, knowledge, and instruction. In Christ, everything we need we already have. But that doesn't mean we don't need to remain diligent or continue to receive God's truth. After all, Paul's letter is filled with what he calls "bold" reminders, corrections, and instruction. That's what we'll

look at next. Like Rome, our community in Chicago needs gospel *encouragement* but we also need gospel *instruction*.

Movement 2: Gospel Instruction (vv.15-16, Galatians 1:6-7, Romans 1:16, 6:23, 12:2)

Paul has to address the elephant in the room. *If he's so satisfied about his readers, then why did he just spend over fourteen chapters on the most exhaustive articulation of the gospel found anywhere in the Bible?* Well, I think it's because a good start does not ensure a good finish. Or as writer C.S. Lewis explains at the beginning of his wife's book on the Ten Commandments, *"every old tutor ... knows that those pupils who needed our assistance the least are generally also those who acknowledge it most largely"* (*Smoke on the Mountain*, 11). That's what grieved Paul so much about the church in Galatia. ***Read Galatians 1:6-7 ... I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.*** The Galatians started off well ... they were filled with goodness, knowledge, and instructed one another ... but along the way they began to neglect the truth of the gospel. The Galatians had access to a wealth of heavenly wisdom in Paul and every spiritual resource in Christ, but they failed to ask for help or ask questions or submit to on going instruction.

Paul doesn't want this to happen in Rome. And we should be so careful that this doesn't happen to us in Chicago. This is one of Paul's primary motivations for writing the book of Romans ... that they would keep growing in faith, that they would stay curious, that they would remain grounded in the gospel. So throughout

the book he has given them extensive gospel *instruction*. Look at vv.15-16. *Read Romans 15:15-16 ... But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.* Okay, so Paul is essentially saying ... *even though I'm satisfied and deeply encouraged by your faith and the evidence of your faith, I wanted to remind you of the fundamentals of God's grace because that's my job. As an apostle, Paul's calling is to not simply preach the gospel but define it. Therefore his responsibility has been to instruct his reader in the things of God.*

Now, we should keep in mind that the gospel had already been proclaimed in Rome before Paul wrote Romans. Paul didn't start the church in Rome. And so, his reminders aren't reminders because he has told them before, or because he was there from the start like in Galatia. Rather, he has seen and heard the evidence of the initial work of the gospel in Rome and now he's coming to support that work. Specifically, I think he has reminded Roman Christian about three primary aspects of the gospel, which fuel their on-going development and further support the idea that in Christ, everything they need they already have ...

- **Reminder 1: The gospel is the power of God.** That's where we began. *Read Romans 1:16 ... For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* The gospel is a message. It's an announcement. The core composition of the gospel is 1.) Jesus lived historically, 2.) Jesus died sacrificially, 3.) Jesus was buried literally, 4.) Jesus rose victoriously, and 5.) Jesus ascended authoritatively. Together the gospel can be summarized as

the singular announcement that contradicted the "good news" of the day that Caesar was Lord ... the gospel announcement is that *Jesus is Lord!* And this reality ... this truth Paul says is ***the power of God***. What Jesus has done and who Jesus is brings salvation to humanity. It transforms individual souls and it inaugurates an in-breaking kingdom of peace and joy and love. Paul has boldly reminded us that the gospel is *the power of God* from the start of Romans.

- **Reminder 2: The gospel is for everyone.** One of the primary, if not *the* primary, tensions facing the Roman church at the time was the integration of Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) into the same fellowship, the same church family. So Paul's repeated big idea, which we've named this series is that through the gospel we're justified by love. We're not justified by our ethnicity. We're not justified by the law. We're not justified by our obedience, morality, or niceness. Anyone and everyone is justified through Christ. If salvation is all about Christ, that means the gospel is for everyone. Zooming out in chapters 5-6, Paul speaks about condemnation and justification in terms of humanity, it's universal ... ***Read Romans 6:23 ... For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** Paul has boldly reminded us that even though everyone has sinned ... *the gospel is everyone*.
- **Reminder 3: The gospel changes everything.** Building on the power of God and the universality of the gospel, Paul goes on to show how the gospel is not simply something for our salvation, but the framework by which we see the world. The gospel is our safeguard and vision in a world that seeks to change us. ***Read Romans 12:2 ... Do not be conformed to this world, but be***

transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. The gospel helps us battle sin daily. It does so primarily by giving us vision for the new world God is bringing in fullness, constantly inviting us to trust, love, and alleg ourselves with him rather than the powers and principles of this world. The hope and power the world offers always lead to destruction and pain. But the gospel empowers us to live with goodness, righteousness, and wholeness in a fracture world. Paul has boldly reminded us that *the gospel changes everything.*

There is much that Paul does not want his reader to neglect as the continue in faith. But nearly all of what he has to say hangs on these three reminders. And in his reminding, his encouragement takes on a fuller meaning. Paul's gospel ***encouragement*** and gospel ***instruction*** are deeply instructive to us. He combines affection and truth. *Is your encouragement like this? Is mine?* Honestly, I think I'm prone to a brand of encouragement that's more like flattery. In the next chapter Paul will actually warns about people like this. ***Read Romans 16:18 ... For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*** Flattery is fawning the ego—both the *flatterer* and the *flatteree*. It's nice words without truth. Perhaps you're not down with flattery, but maybe you just don't say anything. You know someone is full of goodness and knowledge but you don't tell them. Silence is presuming a person knows their quality or fears that encouragement will "go to their heads." It's truth without words.

What we're going to learn next is that when gospel ***encouragement*** meets on-going gospel ***instruction*** this community can experience real gospel ***growth***—true

transformation, healing, and maturity. Something neither flattery nor silence can achieve.

Movement 3: Gospel Growth (vv.16-17, 1 John 1:5-7, Romans 5:8)

Paul concludes his nostalgic reflections with a "so that." Meaning he shows us the implications or result of his satisfaction. *Read Romans 15:16-17 ... so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.* One of the problems that Paul had no doubt heard about from Rome, despite all their faithfulness, was that most of the house-churches were exclusively Jewish and others were exclusively Gentiles. They were deeply divided. And so Paul doesn't just want them to agree on the same message, he wants them to reorient and change their habits and social structures as a result of the gospel. That's what sanctification is all about. Scholar N.T. Wright explains that, *"The death and resurrection of Jesus is, for Paul, not simply a historical reality that has created a new situation, but a pattern that must be woven into every aspect of church life"* (Paul, 336). In other words, if non-Jewish people are accepted by God they ought to be accepted by Jews. The gospel changes what you think ... believe ... trust ... how you act ... your very being. It grows you to look more like Jesus.

Sanctification is, as Wright suggests, the process of weaving the gospel into our lives. It's realizing that in Christ, everything we need we already have. The gospel is not merely for the bedside of conversion. The gospel is for all of your life.

The gospel is for your marriage.

The gospel is for your trauma.
The gospel is for your work.
The gospel is for your school choice.
The gospel is for your friendship.
The gospel is for your sex life, or lack thereof.
The gospel is for your money.
The gospel is for your shame.
The gospel is for your vacation.
The gospel is for your ego.
The gospel is for your joy.

This is the kind of community we're after at Church in the Square. The kind of community in which the gospel brings transformation, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. And we've been given a massive help here in Paul's words. Gospel **growth** is a result of gospel **encouragement** and gospel **instruction**. *What's that mean? Well, it means when we see goodness (what someone is becoming) or we see knowledge (what someone is learning) that we tell them.* This is how we grow. We encourage each other in the gospel. It also means when we don't see that goodness or knowledge as the Lord has instructed, we remind them that the gospel is powerful ... the gospel is for everyone ... the gospel changes everything. This is how we grow. We remind each other of the gospel.

Gospel **growth** is on John's mind as he writes to a scattered generation of believers who were undergoing incredible hardship. In his message he essentially defines gospel **growth** as walking in the light. ***Read 1 John 1:5-7 ... This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness,***

we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. The gospel is the light; the fullness of Jesus lordship and affection. And we're encouraged, not just to walk in the light but we're told in the light we'll be fully known and enjoyed—we'll have fellowship. It's beautiful!

Now, this seems great, *right? Then why is it so elusive? Why is it so hard?* Well, because there is a lie you and I believe on the daily about life together, about sanctification ... it's a lie I believed on Sunday night in a meeting with our elder team. We believe that if we are truly known then we won't be loved. In other words, if you really know my tempter ... my greed ... my judgmentalism ... my racism ... my lust ... if you know my weakness and frailty ... if I really walk in the light ... then I won't have fellowship. I'll be rejected. *So what do I need? What do you need to overcome this lie?* We need encouragement. We need reminders that a lie is not the truth. That's not how the Father speaks. We need gospel encouragement. We need gospel instruction.

That's the darkness.

That's not your Father.

The late pastor and author Tim Keller uses this exact language to describe the essence of the gospel. He says, ***“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us”*** (*Meaning of Marriage*, 101). Church, that's the gospel. That's the good news. You have been

fully known. You have been completely seen in your brokenness, weakness, and sinfulness. *And?* You've been accepted. You've been loved. You've been changed.

Paul said this too. ***Read Romans 5:8 ... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** Notice when? Not after you were a sinner. Not before you were a sinner. *While* you were a sinner. That's when Christ died for you. That's when God bestowed his lavish love upon you. The more we get this into our lives, the more we grow. The more we walk in this light more and more, and trust the darkness less and less the more we grow. The more we embrace fellowship, encouragement and instruction, in the light ... with the Lord ... the more we grow. Knowing that we are loved and known, completely. I think that's actually who we are. And when we live as we are, our Heavenly Father is satisfied and proud to call us his children.

Church in the Square, in Christ ... everything we need we already have.