

Series: The Reign of Grace  
Message: Instruction, Authority, and Purpose  
Romans 15:14-33 Daniel Hickinbotham / March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Introduction:

- Brothers and sisters... we have come a long way together in this Romans study... and we are quickly approaching the end.
  - For some of you this a relief
  - For some of you this may be a disappointment.
    - But the ground we have covered over the last year is potentially THE richest and most beautiful theologically in the New Testament.
      - In our passage today, Paul engages in some of his typical end of letter stuff, updating his people on where he is at currently, what he plans to do, greet this person and that person, issues a couple of warnings, and then a final benediction...
        - At this point it is easy to zone out... to dismiss these portions as unimportant to us today...
          - But ALL scripture is beneficial.
            - In this passage Paul addresses 3 pertinent things about himself and all those who belong to the Lord.
    - The main thrust of this passage is reaffirmation.
      - We aren't going to do a direct comparison, but if you go back and read Romans 1, verses 1-15, you will see that our passage today (Romans 15:14-33) is filled with reaffirmation of what Paul wrote there.
  - What I want us to see this morning is that Paul is issuing a Reaffirmation of Instruction, a Reaffirmation of Authority, and a Reaffirmation of Purpose.
- Re-affirmation of Instruction
  - 4 My brothers and sisters, I myself am convinced about you that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. 15 Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points...
    - Although he has never met these folks he holds them in high regard.
      - In Chapter 1 he said that their faith had become known throughout the world.
    - He acknowledges that they are full of the spiritual fruit of goodness.
    - He acknowledges that they are filled with all knowledge, of God, of the Christian faith and ethics
    - So filled with goodness and knowledge that they are rightly able to instruct one another in these things.
      - Yet he still has taken the time to write this behemoth of a letter reminding them "more boldly" on some points...
  - What are some of those points?
    - God's wrath against unrighteousness and ungodliness is revealed in the descent of mankind into moral insanity (Rom 1:16-32)
      - That people are not innocent victims of sin, nor ignorant of the truth, but they in fact SUPPRESS the truth in the unrighteousness they embrace.
        - That they give accolades to those who do what *they* know is lawless and evil.
    - Yet even those who have religion... who have the the law, who claim to love the truth, can find no comfort in laws ability to rescue them.
      - That the Law only reveals their works to be a form of hypocrisy and self-righteousness that has caused God's name to be blasphemed among those who do not have the Law.
    - That what is required by the law is true circumcision... not of the physical flesh that can be undertaken in ethnocentric pride... but a circumcision of the heart,

- The nail in the coffin is driven home when humanity is revealed to be thoroughly wicked... no one seeks God... no one is righteous.
  - Those who were made in the image of God and tasked with carrying his goodness, beauty and truth throughout the earth have all turned to death-dealing deception... broadcasting lies about a Holy God through their evil deeds and intentions.
- But God has not only revealed his wrath against this evil...
  - ...He has revealed his Righteousness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- Though none could ever justify themselves, the gift of justification has been delivered to them by the One who is both the offended party and the judge.
  - A justification by faith... not of self-righteous works.
  - A justification for ALL people... not just the Jews, but the pagan Gentiles.
- And that justification does not only provide us a legal decree of righteousness... but it actually RECONCILES us to God... It ends our Exile from the Garden... it destroys the spiritual cancer passed down to us from Adam...
- It ends the reign of sin in death and ushers in the reign of grace resulting in eternal life, eternal reunion with God.
  - In that reign of grace we are free... free from the specter of death certainly... but free in a real temporal sense...
    - We are FREE to put off the old man and put on the new.
    - We are FREE to exercise our agency to do that which is pleasing to God and brings blessing
    - We are FREE from the Chaos of a dependence upon self... upon the flesh...
    - We are FREE to depend upon and be led by the very Spirit of God.
    - We are FREE as children to cry out "Abba... Father"
      - And someday all Creation, including ourselves, will be FREE from the bondage to decay... FREE from futility... FREE from sin entirely.
        - And nothing... not suffering or demons or persecution or any other circumstance will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus... now or in the age to come.
- And although there is great tragedy in ethnic Israel's corporate rejection of this Gospel, there is great joy that God, in His sovereignty, has used and will use it to bring into His family all the elect people from all the nations.
  - Because of this election and justification... we are to live a life as an offering... consumed by honoring God...
  - Humble members of the body, serving one another with our spiritual gifts, bearing spiritual fruit, and abounding in mercy towards one another.
    - And we live under the recognition of God's authority not just in our private spiritual lives but as citizens who genuinely believe that Jesus is the King of the world.
      - We are to put him on... represent him in the love that we show one another, as a public display of his kingdom in the earth...
  - We now live under the law of love and the law of liberty... a law that frees us to bear with each other's weaknesses. To help each other along towards maturity and Christian freedom. A law that puts to death our insistence on pet preferences and preserves one another in the choices we make.
    - We are to protect the unity of those who are within the church...
    - And we are to long for the addition of those who are without... those who have not heard... those who remain gripped in the power of sin and death... we long for them to hear the good news of God's gracious King...
      - We are to give ourselves to this longing so that all for whom Christ has died will be brought into the family of God.

- These are just some of the points that Paul has affirmed in this letter... and it is beautiful... and compelling... and true... (some of you are bored with this)
  - Still...
- My first question when studying this text was:
- If they are so filled with goodness, knowledge, and the ability to instruct, why would they need this letter from Paul?
  - In writing this letter, and in acknowledging their good character, Paul is practicing two things we should take note of:
    - Paul is practicing diplomacy.
      - Paul was a smart dude. He had motives for writing to this church. He wasn't just chit-chatting, but trying to accomplish something, both within this congregation and for his own God-given mission.
      - Obviously Paul was trying to correct some of the wrong beliefs and attitudes that Roman Christians held.
      - Additionally, this church was strategically placed as a launching point for the farthest western reaches of the empire, and Paul had his sights set to take the Gospel there.
        - Rather than coming in hot like he did with the Corinthian church, which needed a strong hand...
        - Rather than being demanding and insistent...
          - He leans into all the things that the Roman church is healthy in.
          - He strikes a tone of honor and encouragement, and even humility, in order to build relational capital and connection with this group of people.
            - He is not pandering. He is not flattering.
            - He is being courteous and assuming the best of the Romans in order to accomplish a broader Kingdom goal.
    - Paul is practicing discipleship.
      - The bulk of this letter is devoted to doctrinal instruction and its behavioral consequent.
        - Paul has given them a feast of robust theology and directives for the regenerate believers.
          - He does not shrink back from teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training those who are already doing well... who are already within the church... pushing them on towards completion.
      - Why? Because these Christians are in the heart of the Roman empire...
        - They are in the belly of the beast and Paul KNOWS that that empire is trying to make them true believers in ROME... in Caesar...
          - He knows that their culture is trying to disciple them... trying to catechize their children... trying to conform them to the spirit of the age... trying to make them in the image of Rome.
            - And so he disciplines them in the truth. He doesn't worry about offending their intellects or their maturity... he washes them in the truth.
  - Paul reveals that diplomacy and discipleship are not antithetical to one another... they are both necessary for the expansion and maintenance of the Kingdom and the family of God...
    - So, after re-affirming his instruction... Paul issues a...

- Re-affirmation of Authority (Romans 15:15-19)
  - 15 Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points[i] because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God. God's purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 Therefore I have reason to boast in Christ Jesus regarding what pertains to God. 18 For I would not dare say anything except what Christ has accomplished through me by word and deed for the obedience of the Gentiles, 19 by the power of miraculous signs and wonders, and by the power of God's Spirit. As a result, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum.
  - Paul roots his authority to give instruction... to bind the consciences of these Roman believers... in his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles and in the demonstrable works that have been done through him.
    - In absence of personal relationship with them, he is providing the Roman church a short resume...
      - Here and in Romans 1 he is claiming to be both the subject matter expert and the designated formal authority to deliver this instruction.
        - Now, he boasts in what **God** has done IN and THROUGH him, not what he has accomplished on his own volition.
          - God called and appointed him an apostle, and although intensely Jewish in culture and upbringing, gave him the burden for the Gentiles.
          - His proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles has been attended by the power of God in signs and wonders.
          - He has faithfully obeyed God, and labored across the eastern reaches of the empire, planting churches and carrying the gospel to the very doorstep of Rome.
      - Now Paul's claims aren't like the claims that many who call themselves apostles today make...
        - Claims that are in the main unverifiable...
        - The churches that Paul planted, and the churches they planted, lasted a long time in those regions.
          - The Church in Smyrna lasted until the Armenian genocide in 1922.
          - Rome was eventually converted to Christianity as a consequence of Paul's mission.
          - Paul's claims of authority are PROVEN in this Room...
          - Gentile brothers and sisters... Paul is OUR apostle.
            - We know the good news of Jesus Christ because of Paul's Apostolic work.
            - The Gospel has come to us because of his authority.
      - And notice that Paul was a faithful servant of God's will... he saw his authority as a delegated authority...
        - NOTE in v 16... It is **God's intention** that the Gentiles be presented to Him as a sanctified offering.
          - By what means are a people sanctified?
            - Through the very Gospel that Paul is preaching.
            - This is what he means by being a priest!
              - The role of the OT priest was to bring the offerings of the people before the Lord and in the Gospel... that offering is the people themselves.
                - Paul is thrilled that God works, by His Spirit, in and through Him to bring to glory to Jesus in the salvation of the Gentiles.
      - Paul understands that he is an ambassador. He is both a man under authority of a sovereign ruler and given authority from that Sovereign Ruler to proclaim the authoritative message which is: "Jesus is Lord."
        - And Paul is reaffirming authority here. But he is also providing.
- Re-affirmation of Purpose (Romans 15:20-21)
  - 20 My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else's foundation, 21 but, as it is written, Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.

- Here Paul expounds on his purposes for going to Rome
  - In Romans 1 Paul tells the Romans that he longs to come to them so that they can be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, that he wants to have fruitful ministry among them...
    - He is under obligation to Greeks... these Roman folks... and to barbarians... those on the far reaches of the western empire.
      - So Paul is developing their understanding of his purposes in wanting to get there.
- In verses 22-33, Paul explains that his goal is to set up a base of operations with them in order to be sent out to Spain.
  - He recognizes that a good foundation has already been laid in Rome and he isn't called to build on another person's foundation, but to move out into the inky darkness of unreached lands and illuminate it with the light of Christ.
    - He recognizes that the flag of Christ has already been hoisted in Rome and soon the King will conquer there, so he must continue on past them.
      - And this isn't an innovation on Paul's part.
        - He didn't get together with His ministry team and say, "How can we be on the cutting edge of Christianity?"
          - "What hot new project can we undertake in order to garner some religious market share?"
  - In verse 21 he references Isaiah 52... a passage about the suffering servant's exaltation...
    - See, my servant[c] will be successful;[d] he will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted.... 15 so he will sprinkle many nations.[f] Kings will shut their mouths because of him, for they will see what had not been told them, and they will understand what they had not heard.
      - Paul is looking back into the Old Testament scriptures and recognizing that all the nations belong to the Messiah... all of them are his sacred and holy inheritance... all kings and nobles and peasants and paupers owe Him their allegiance... their worship....
        - Jesus is WORTHY of their allegiance and worship... worthy to receive glory and honor from every tongue tribe and nation.
          - Yet there are still those who have not seen. Have not seen the beauty of Christ and His Gospel
          - There are still those who have not heard. Have not heard of the wonderful righteousness God has revealed in Jesus
            - There are still those bound in slavery to their sin...
            - Those still staggering under the wrath of God that is revealed against that sin...
    - And though his kinsmen may have failed to be the light of God to the nations, Paul is unwilling to fail in the same way....
      - He is committed to bearing the standard of Christ to unconquered territories with the Good News that Christ claims it all... the land, the air, the culture, the people... Christ lays his claim of loving Lordship over all of it...
        - ...and it moves something in Paul that there are people and places and nations and families that have yet be offered to God as a holy sacrifice.
          - Paul re-affirms that his purpose is not to come and perform his rockstar show in Rome, but to pierce the darkness in the hinterlands of the expanding Kingdom of God.
            - And we are to participate in this...
    - Paul is our example.
      - Yes Jesus is our ultimate example...
        - And it is good and right to seek to emulate Christ...
          - But Paul also tells us to emulate HIM as HE emulates Christ.

- It is good to have human examples... heroes even... as long as we don't turn them into idols...
  - And Paul's near compulsion to accomplish his God given purpose serves as a wonderful example.
- So what does this mean for us? besides rejoicing over the success of Paul's mission that has brought us into the family of God.
- Application
  - Our application of this text can be derived by asking ourselves a few questions:
    - Who are you receiving instruction from and who are you giving instruction to?
      - Paul makes it clear that the Roman church is doing a pretty bang-up job. Yet he unashamedly instructs them in the Gospel and fully expects them to be receptive to it and to instruct one another.
      - And Paul warns them about not being conformed to the age, but be transformed by the renewing of their minds...
        - Because the world, and the ruler of this world, uses everything... traditional media, social media, politics, education, advertising, music, TV, YouTube, unbelieving friends and neighbors... EVERYTHING... to try and conform us to the way of the world.
        - It is a non-stop barrage of godless worldview and narrative...
          - Think about something as innocent as Peppa Pig...
    - Watch it for long enough and hopefully you will notice that there is no conception of God within that show.
      - No external transcendent reality from which meaning and morals are derived
      - No supernaturalism
        - It is subtly reinforcing a secular materialist worldview.
          - There is no God... Morality is boiled down to being nice... and all that exists is that which can be seen...
            - Now I don't have a vendetta against Peppa Pig...
              - But to my shame, in an hour by hour comparison, Clementine has been exposed to more Peppa and Bluey and Disney than she has to her bible.
            - Which do you think is instructing her more effectively?
    - The average American will spend, depending on the study, between 8 and 13 hours consuming media in a day.
      - 8-13 hours a day of another person's thoughts, values, worldview, experience being poured into your mind and heart...
      - That means during most of our waking hours, we are consuming some kind of media... music, podcasts, lectures, talk radio, TV etc. etc.
      - And all of it is promoting... instructing... attempting to conform us to something...
        - How much do we think our 30 minutes of bible study or family devotions is really doing to counteract that tidal wave...
          - Now, not all media is bad. I love listening to my audiobible.... But...
          - We must ask WHO are we receiving instruction from? Who is our primary instructor? The world? Joe Rogan and his guests? Tucker Carlson? Whoever is left on CNN? Some random Youtuber? Or God through His Word? Brothers and sisters in Christ? Fathers and mothers in the faith? Christian mentors?
            - Ask yourself who... who or what has the most time with you... that's what is likely giving you instruction.
    - The Second part of this question is who are you giving instruction to?
      - Fathers, are you taking seriously the call in scripture to instruct your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, or are you expecting Sunday School or your wife to do that?

- Older women, are you taking seriously the call in Titus 2 to instruct younger women?
  - Older men, same question... but you know... with younger men...
  - Wise people... are you instructing the foolish?
  - Stronger believers... are you instructing the weak?
    - Too often I sit with men who are experiencing the pain of having failed to give godly instruction to their families in a fashion that counters the world's indoctrination... whether out of convenience, confusion, or cowardice.... and now their wives are leaving... or their children are imploding... or an ungodly worldview is leading them all to destruction...
      - Adam FAILED to instruct his wife in the Garden... that the snake wasn't actually looking out for her best interests...
        - ...his failure to instruct was a failure to serve her... a failure to love her...
          - Failing to boldly give loving instruction to those in your sphere of authority is usually not an act of gentleness or deference, it is an act of betrayal...
      - But we must always consider our diplomacy in these matters as well... sometimes a strong hand is needed... sometimes a winsome word.
  - The next question we need to ask for sake of application is:
- Whose authority are you submitting to and what authority have you been given?
    - We don't have time to get into a deep discussion on spheres of authority... if you are interested you can talk to me or come to the worldview class starting April 5<sup>th</sup>... I love exploring the topic.
      - But we are ALL under the authority of Christ.
        - Matthew 28 makes it plain that ALL authority... not just heavenly authority but earthy authority... all authority has been given to Christ, and as a result of that... we are to go and make disciples of all the nations...
          - Now traditionally, Reformed Christians have envisioned the absolute authority of God being delegated to humanity and grouped within three earthly spheres:
            - The government
            - The church
            - The family
              - I would make an argument that biblically there are 5 spheres, including the individual and the people corporately.
          - But whether there are 3 or 5... they are all authorities that are delegated from the ULTIMATE authority... to serve His purposes...
            - And all of them are good and have a just claim over you to some degree.
              - Thankfully none of them are ultimate authorities, that is reserved for Christ... but they are legitimate authorities within their spheres...
      - I used to hate formal church membership... <Discuss my membership conversion>
        - I was happy to submit to the general concept of the church and membership within it.... Because you can't be confronted by a general concept...
          - I didn't want to submit to a specific church because they CAN in fact confront me... can examine my life.... Can practice discipline on me for the sake of my spiritual health and well-being... they can ACTUALLY exercise authority.
  - So whose authority are you actually submitted to? In your heart of hearts.
    - Are you submitted to the government in your attitude and practices?
    - Are you submitted to a church?
    - Are you submitted to your position and responsibilities within your family?
    - Are you submitted to the word of God?
      - A way to gauge if you are submitted is to consider how you respond to instruction.

- If a parent, a pastor, a government representative, a fellow believer, an employer, your spouse, gives you corrective instruction or feedback, what's your instant response?
    - Gratitude and honest consideration?
    - Investigation and introspection?
    - Or revulsion and anger?
    - Denial and self-justification?
      - How we respond to legitimate authority reflects our hearts posture toward that authority.
- And what authority has God has given you?
  - Are you a parent? Then he has given you a high and lofty calling to use your authority to raise your child up in the way they should go. To instruct them in the fear and nurture of the Lord. Sometimes that is family devotions. Sometimes that is keeping them alive. Sometimes it is walking through the complexity and hurt of life with them while pointing them back to their Savior.
  - Are you an employer? Then God has given you the calling to exercise authority in the marketplace, dealing justly with customers and employees, stewarding resources and bringing a return on them. He has given you authority to require equal weights and measures of your people and those whom you engage in business with.
  - Are you a member of this church? Then God has given you calling and authority to do all the one anothers... instruct one another... encourage one another... bear one anothers burdens... deal peacably with one another... forgive one another....
  - Are you a believer? Then God has given you the authority to proclaim Christ and His Gospel...
    - Whatever authority God has entrusted to you, are you using it as Paul did, to be about the Lord's business and to present a Holy Offering unto the Lord.
      - Or are you using it to enlarge you station in life... to bolster your reputation... to control or manipulate... to act as gatekeeper of the Gospel?
        - Or are you ignoring it? Adam abdicated his authority over the creation in the garden when he didn't rebuke the snake or shepherd his wife.
    - How we use our authority will be determined by what our purpose is...
- What purpose is driving you?
  - Is it selfish gain? Comfort? Vanity? Vengeance?
    - Or like Paul, is it honor and glory of Christ among all people?
      - Do you see your job as a God-given vocation in which you are bringing the message of the excellencies of Christ in the way you perform your duties and the services you provide?
        - Or is it simply a means to make money... a thing that pays for your fun on the weekend...
      - Do you see your role as a parent as a primary contribution to the flourishing of humanity and glorifying God as you develop and shepherd along your littles who are made in His image?
        - Or is it a burden... a sacrifice of your childless freedoms and sleep patterns?
      - Do you see your singleness as an opportunity to carry Christ's standard to unreached hills and hearts?
        - Or is it a curse from which you are trying to escape.
    - Brothers and sisters, God has given us a lofty purpose... to proclaim Christ to all we come in contact with... both through our proclamation and our undertakings... Not all of us are called to physically go to the ends of the earth for the glory of Christ... Some of us are called to be scientists and engineers, truck drivers and tradesmen, doctors, nurses, fast food workers, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters and to live our lives right here in the southeast corner of Idaho... where there are still 1000's who have not heard the good news that Christ is Lord... 1000s that have not been presented as a sanctified offering to the Lord... and our purpose is to bring them into the family and expand the territory of the Kingdom.