

"Who Is Your Offering to God?"

Romans 15:14-16:27

Dr. Jerry Nelson

In 1631 John Eliot, at 27 years of age, sailed from England to America.

To give you some historical perspective - remember, that was 140 years before the Revolutionary War.

After being in Boston for several years he noted there were 20 tribes of Indians in the area.

Eliot believed that God's name should be proclaimed among all the peoples of the world.

So when he was over 40 he set himself to study the Algonquin language and he translated the entire Bible into that Indian tongue

By the time he was 84 he had established many Indian churches with their own Indian pastors. (from John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, 50-51 from Cotton Mather Vol 1 The Great works of Christ in America 1702 Vol 1, 562)

What was Eliot's passion in life?

What is yours?

What gets you up in the morning?

What determines how you spend yourself each day?

Are you headed somewhere in life?

When you arrive will it be worth the life you invested?

How old are you?

Assume you live to average life expectancy in America - 78.

How many years do you have left to invest?

For what will you invest those years of your life?

Look with me please at Romans chapter 15.

The Apostle Paul has come to the end of his long letter to the Christians in Rome.

It would not have taken Paul as long to write the letter or the Romans

to read the letter as it has taken us to study it.

Seven months and 26 sermons later we arrive at the end of his letter.

I have attempted a short overview of the book and placed in at the end of the sermon notes online.

Paul began his letter by telling the Romans how much he wanted to see them:

"God, whom I serve with my whole heart... is my witness...how I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you..." 1:10-11

Now at the end of the letter he writes again,

"Since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so." "That by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed." 15:23,32

But not only does he open and close his letter with his stated desire to be with them but much more importantly, he also opens and closes his letter with what motivates his life.

At the very beginning of chapter 1 Paul said,

Romans 1:1,5 "I have been set apart by God for the good news...for Christ's name's sake...to call people from among all the peoples to the obedience that comes from faith - people who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."

And Paul ends his letter on the same theme:

Romans 15:16 I am "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

Paul in essence writes, "I live that God may be honored by people."

Notice I didn't just say that people might know God.

As important as that is, Paul's purpose was larger - that God may be loved and obeyed (honored) by people.

That's what I want us to think about today.

Paul's purpose has never wavered - his vision is just as clear

as ever and his passion has not waned.

Again, I ask, what is your passion in life?

Look with me at the Apostle Paul's passion and let it be to you and me a challenge - a clarion call to reorder the priorities of our lives.

We are looking at the rather long final section of Paul's letter today: Romans 15:14-16:27.

I plan to read just the beginning and the ending of this section but I will give you an outline of what is between.

Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Romans 15:14-19a "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.¹⁵ I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.¹⁸ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—¹⁹ by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

At that point, Paul tells of his plans to visit them:

15:19b-22 I have completed my work in SE Europe.

15:23-24 I am planning to visit you on my way to Spain.

15:25-27 But first, I must take donated money to Jerusalem to help the poor Christians there.

15:28-33 Then I will visit you; pray for my safety and ministry until then.

Paul then makes a special appeal for a friend: 16:1-2

He gives greetings to numerous friends in the church at Rome: 16:3-16 (The names give us insight into the diversity of people in the church – men, women, Jew , Gentile, slave, free, rich, poor, aristocracy and commoners.)

At that point Paul gives a final warning to watch out for divisive people: 16:17-20

Several who are with Paul indicate their greetings: 16:21-23

Then we come to the Benediction: 16:25-27

²⁵ Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

It is from 15:14-16 and 16:25-27 of this final section of Romans that I wish to show you Paul's purpose and our purpose in life.

I want to set it before you in three parts:

Paul's mission, his methods and his motivation.

We begin with Paul's mission:

Romans 15:16 “To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

I'm not here this morning to merely give you a biography of Paul's life.

Clearly the intention is to demonstrate that Paul's purpose is ours.

One of the greatest lies perpetrated against the church and its mission in the world is the idea that ministry is the responsibility of clergy.

That is exactly the opposite of what the Bible says in Ephesians 4:11-13 “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Do you see who is responsible for doing the “works of service,” the ministry? God’s people are.

Paul’s purpose is every Christian’s purpose.

Paul declares his and our mission in a rather unique way as “the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God...”

Yes, he says we are to “proclaim the gospel of God.”

But to what end? For what purpose are we to do this?

It is “so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God...”

The offering to God is people!

Here is the way he said it to the Colossian Christians in Colossians 1:28-29 “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so **that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.**²⁹

To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”

Those verses grabbed hold of me 45 years ago in a dorm room at the University of Wisconsin and have, ever since, guided me to give my life to what is most important and enduring and have guarded me when I have been tempted to respond to the siren call of lesser purposes.

The very words “priestly” and “offering” immediately convey ideas of the OT sacrifices to God.

Sacrifices fitting for a holy God had to be without blemish – they were to be perfect.

In 15:16 they are called “acceptable.”

The offering had to meet God’s standards.

The author of Hebrews said it this way: Hebrews 12:14 “without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

God said in 1 Peter and elsewhere “Be holy, because I am holy.”

So Paul's mission was not just to get people saved but also to bring them to spiritual maturity.

- Galatians 4:19 "My dear children... I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,
- Ephesians 4:13 "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- Or as he says it here in Romans 15:18 "leading the Gentiles to obey God..."

So here is Paul imagining the day when he would stand before God offer God the fruit of his life.

Don't misunderstand this isn't some kind of entrance fee.

This is a love offering. This is a response to God's grace in his life.

This is his loving obedience to Jesus.

"Jesus, here is Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Priscilla and Aquila."

"Jesus, here is Epenitus (and quite a few others Paul mentions in chapter 16) and the people in Ephesus and Colosse."

And Paul could go on listing more and more that by the grace of God he had had the privilege of influencing toward maturity in Christ.

Who will you offer to God?

Several years ago Ray Boltz wrote a song that became quite popular for a while. It was called "Thank You for Giving to the Lord."

The man in the song's story imagines himself in heaven.

Someone approaches him and says,

1. "Friend you may not know me now," and then he said, "But wait you used to teach my Sunday School, when I was only eight.
And every week you would say a prayer before the class would start.
And one day when you said that prayer,
I asked Jesus in my heart."

2. Then another man stood before you, he said "Remember the time,
A missionary came to your church, His pictures made you cry.
You didn't have much money but you gave it anyway.

Jesus took that gift you gave
And that's why I'm in Heaven today"

3. One by one they came, far as your eyes could see.
Each life somehow touched by your generosity.
Little things that you had done, sacrifices that you made,
They were unnoticed on this earth
In Heaven now proclaimed.

And the chorus was,
Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am so glad you gave.

Who will you offer to God? Will it include your spouse, your children, your friends, your neighbors, or co-workers?

Paul's mission went beyond those immediately around him.
Look at 16:26 "so that all nations might believe and obey him."
Paul wanted to be part of offering the people groups of the world to Jesus.

There are Christians who make the unbiblical comment that they just aren't into missions.

They don't give to missions, they don't pray for mission work of the church and they don't give to missions.
Bluntly said, I don't think that is an option for Christians.

I suspect there are some truly valid reasons for not participating in the Kingdom Connection praying and giving ministry of our church but something is wrong when fewer than 300 families out of over 800 even bother to say they will pray much less give.

Some of us need to reevaluate our priorities.

Who will you offer to God?

Our mission in life is clear.
Now what about the methods?

Romans 15:16 “To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

Paul said his priestly duty is “proclaiming the gospel of God.”

Paul is not, here, calling himself a priest.

In the sermon notes on-line you will find further discussion of why the NT doesn’t call ministers “priests.”

But there was one duty of the OT priest that carried over to NT ministers – it is the duty to proclaim and teach God’s Word.

In 16:25 Paul says it this way, “Now to him who is able to **establish you by my gospel** and the proclamation of Jesus Christ...”

This will sound familiar to you but I want you to hear it again loudly and clearly and realize that your lives and eternity depend on it.

The Holy Spirit of God uses the Word of God as taught and lived by the people of God to grow us to be more and more like Christ.

There is no substitute for the Word of God.

It alone is our soul-food.

Without it you will die.

- Jesus said, Matthew 4:4 “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”
- God said through Isaiah 55:11 “My word that goes out from my mouth... will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
- The psalmist wrote, Psalm 119:9,11 “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word... ¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
- Paul wrote to Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the (Christian) may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Many creeds through the centuries as well as the recent 1996 Cambridge Declaration make it abundantly clear that the word of God is the primary means that God uses to accomplish his saving and maturing work in us.

Sola Scriptura “We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. **The Bible alone** teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is **the standard** by which all Christian behavior must be measured.”

My method and your method for producing an offering of people acceptable to God is to proclaim and teach the Word of God.

Never stop being a church that demands of its teachers, its leaders and its pastors that they be people of the Word.

Expect it of your children’s teachers, of your youth workers, of your Sunday School teachers.

I urge you to allow your new pastor to be first of all a teacher of the Bible.

There is great pressure on pastors to be social workers, psychologists, organizers, fund-raisers, chief-executive officers, managers, visionaries, etc.

But above all else what the people of God need is one who will consistently teach the Scriptures, pointing us to Jesus, that God may change us.

Some might think I am saying that we should neglect the rest of our responsibilities to the world as Christians.

But that is not the case.

Proclaiming the Word of God is not instead of helping the poor or instead of healing the broken.

Preaching the Word is the means by which those other ends are accomplished.

The means that God has chosen to change the world is to change us.

The means God has chosen to change us is by learning and living his Word.

When John Calvin was recalled to the church in Geneva, Switzerland in 1536 “he had no money, no influence and no weapons but the word of God. But he preached from the Bible every day, and as he did, under the power of his preaching, the city began to change. As the Genevan people acquired knowledge of God’s Word and allowed it to influence their behavior, their city became a model city from which the gospel spread to the rest of Europe, Great Britain, and the New World. Geneva was cleaned up physically. Beggars were removed from the streets, but a hospital and poorhouse were provided for them, and they were run well. Education was offered for all classes of people... and new industries flourished. There has probably never been a better example of extensive moral and social reform than the transformation of Geneva under John Calvin, and it was accomplished almost entirely by the preaching of God’s Word.”

(in Boice, *Romans*, 1859)

There is another example of this kind of radical change in a culture in Great Britain in the late 18th and early 19th Century.

And it was the direct outgrowth of the Bible teaching and application of Whitefield, Wesley, Wilberforce and countless others.

The world changes when the Christian’s life is anchored in and grows through the living, active, sharp, penetrating, dividing, and judging Word of God. (cf Hebrews 4:12)

There is another method I want you to see.

In 15:16 Paul says these people who are our offering to God are “sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

“Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace by which the whole person is renewed in the image of God and we are made more and more able to become dead to sin and alive to righteousness.”

Think about how someone changes to be more like Christ, to become an offering acceptable to God.

It doesn’t come through knowledge alone, though knowledge is essential, as we have already seen.

It certainly doesn't come through self-effort alone because willpower is insufficient to change the heart even if we could control our behavior.

It takes the supernatural work of God's Spirit to change our desires as well as our behavior.

With the words "sanctified by the Holy Spirit," Paul is certainly implying that we are dependent on the Spirit of God to make the changes in us and others to make us more like Jesus.

When I read those words I cannot help but think of Paul's prayer life.
He knew that the Spirit of God had to act and so he prayed.

Colossians 1:9-10 "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Ephesians 1:17 "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Ephesians 3:16 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Philippians 1:9-11 "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

What do we pray for each other, for our children, and for those others we would offer to God as an acceptable offering?

When my purpose in life changes from my health and wealth and my purpose becomes the offering of people to God, my prayers change.

I've spoken of Paul's and our life-purpose and of the methods, so lastly I want to speak to our motivation.

When Paul began his letter he spoke to the source of his passion.

Romans 1:5 "Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

Now Paul will end his letter on the same theme:

Romans 16:25-27 "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ... to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

David Brainerd, missionary to Native Americans died in 1747 at the age of 29.

He wrote these words seven days before his death:

"Friday, October 2. My soul was this day, at turns, sweetly set on God: I longed to be with him that I might behold his glory... Oh that his kingdom might come in the world; that they might all love and glorify him for what he is in himself; and that the blessed Redeemer might "see (the results) of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

(p474 The works of Jonathan Edwards Vol 7)

That was Paul's passion - he longed to see God honored.

In contrast Andrew Murray wrote: "As we seek to find out why the real army of God that is (working) is so small, (when there are so many millions of Christians in the world), the only answer is - lack of heart. The enthusiasm of the kingdom is missing. And that is because there is so little enthusiasm for the King." (p133 "Key to the Missionary Problem")

Who am I living for? For God's glory?

Do I have a passion to see God honored by my neighbors?

Does it break my heart to have God dishonored by so many?

I'm not asking, does the conduct of others offend my personal sensibilities?

I'm asking, does it grieve me that God is so little known and loved?

Paul saw all of life, including his most mundane activities of traveling by foot from city to city, of meeting with people, of spending time in

prison, of the abuse and persecution he endured, - all of it as part of this sacrifice he was offering to God.

We think of sacrifice as what we give up for God.

Paul is here thinking about what we give to God.

He wanted to give God people - people who knew and glorified God.

The 18th Century Moravians were a people with a zealous desire to see Jesus honored among all peoples.

They became some of the most intrepid missionaries of that era.

I say fearless because fearful they might have been.

Between 1732 and 1768 (just 36 years), 79 of those German people died in their effort to bring the gospel to the slaves of the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John.

But in those same years over 4500 slaves were converted and brought into the church.

The first to go to those islands were Johann Dober and David Nitschmann.

As they prepared to leave the safety of Germany and home to go to those lawless, disease infested islands many reports from sea captains made it clear that they would likely die in that place.

No one could survive the life of the slaves.

It is reported that as their ship set sail and pulled away from the dock some were still asking "why would you do this?"

While we might have expected them to speak of their compassion for the slaves of the West Indies, what they focused on was exactly what Paul focused on:

The response given by the two men was: "The savior is well worth giving one's life for." Worthy is the Lamb!

(p275 A Caribbean Mission by CGA Oldendorp)

They had a passion for God's glory.

So did Paul. Do we?

Our mission: that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God

Our methods: the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God and prayer.

Our motivation: to the only wise God be glory forever

Romans 15:14-17; 16:25-27 “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.¹⁵ I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.... Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Announce the Canto Deo Choir and Lord’s Supper at the Good Friday service this Friday.

Nurseries and Children’s programs through age 5.
Join us for a grand celebration of the Resurrection next Sunday.

A Summary of *Romans*

The Theme of the Book:

Romans 1:16-17 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Humanity’s Problem:

1:20-21 “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 1:25 “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator 2:5 “because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath , when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 3:9-11 “What shall we conclude then? Are we any better ? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. ¹⁰ As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”

God’s Remedy:

3:21-24 “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 3:28 “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. 4:4-5 “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

The Great Results:

Peace with God

5:1-2 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 5:8-9 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

Freedom from the controlling power of sin

6:1-2 “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 6:3,6 “don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. 6:14-15 “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. 8:5,9 “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires... You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit...”

We are Adopted into God’s Forever Family

8:15-17 “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

We will be resurrected from the dead.

8:18-23 “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed...we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

We are now under God’s constant care

8:28-30 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

God guarantees his love.

8:38-39 “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are chosen by God's mercy!

9:16 “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

What about the Jews

10:16 “not all the Israelites accepted the good news.

11:1 “Did God reject his people? By no means!

11:5 “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

11:25-26 “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved

Our Response to Grace:

12:1-2 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

12:10 “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 12:17 “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 13:1 “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

13:9 “The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 14:13 “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.

Benediction

16:25-27 “Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Christians and Priests:

In Romans 15:16 does Paul give warrant for calling ministers, “priests?”

A priest is “One authorized to perform the sacred rights of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God.” (Miriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary)

In the Bible the word “priest” is related to the Hebrew word for “one who stands” before God.

The OT priest represented the people to God through the sacrifices.

Exodus 28:1 “Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests.

Leviticus 9:7 The priest is instructed: “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded.”

The priests were also to proclaim the word of God to the people.

Malachi 2:7 “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty.”

But in the NT the role of the priest is superseded by Christ who is final and infinite priest fulfilling all the purposes of the OT priests and the sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:11-12 “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 10:11-12 “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Unfortunately, within a couple of hundred years of the beginning of the church, the idea of church ministers being called priests developed. The whole idea grew from copying both the cultures around them and the OT priesthood. A special class of Christians, the ministers, wore more and more elaborate clothing. They began calling the communion table an altar. They began to think of the bread and wine of the Lord’s Table as the literal body and blood of Jesus and thus offered them time after time as a sacrifice. But all of this was contrary to what God teaches us in the book of Hebrews and elsewhere.

Remember, a priest is a mediator. But now the only mediator between God and man is Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5 “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Hebrews 9:14-15 “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance

We believe it is misleading and thus improper to refer to a Christian minister as a priest. And there is no altar at the front of our churches. The ultimate altar was the real cross on which Jesus died. The Lord’s Table is not an altar. I want to suggest that the only altar remaining is the human heart. Romans 12:1 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”

See a lengthy but helpful article at
<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/catholicscandal.htm>
It is titled "*The Scandal of the Catholic Priesthood (Selected Scriptures)* Copyright 2002
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The primary role of a pastor to preach/teach the Word of God

The church's word to its pastor: "We want you to be responsible for saying and acting among us what we believe about God and kingdom and gospel... We believe that the invisible is more important than the visible at any one single moment and in any single event that we choose to examine... We need help in keeping our beliefs sharp and accurate and intact. We don't trust ourselves; our emotions seduce us into infidelities. We know we are launched on a difficult and dangerous act of faith in life, and there are strong influences intent on diluting or destroying it. We want you to give us help... Be a minister of the Word... (Let God speak through you into all the different parts and stages of our lives) – in our work and play, with our children and our parents, at birth and death, in our celebrations and sorrows, on those days when morning breaks over us in a wash of sunshine, and those other days that are all drizzle.

This isn't the only task in the life of faith but it is your task. We will find someone else to do the other important and essential tasks. This is yours: Word and Sacrament. One more thing: We are going to ordain you to this ministry, and we want your vow that you will stick to it. This is not a temporary job assignment for you but a way of life that we need lived out in our community. We know you are launched on the same difficult belief venture in the same dangerous world as I am. I know your emotions are as fickle as ours and your mind is as tricky as ours. That is why we are going to extract a vow from you. We know there will be days and months, maybe even years, when we won't feel like believing anything and won't want to hear it from you. And we know there will be days and weeks and even years when you won't feel like saying it. It doesn't matter. Do it. You are ordained to this ministry, vowed to it...

Promise right now that you won't give in to what we demand of you. You are not the minister of our changing desires or our time-conditioned understanding of our needs, or our secularized hopes for something better....

There are many other things to be done in this wrecked world, and we are going to be doing at least some of them, but if we don't know the foundational realities with which we are dealing – God, Kingdom, Gospel – we are going to end up living futile, fantasy lives. Your task is to keep telling the basic story, representing the presence of the Spirit, insisting on the priority of God, and speaking the biblical words of command and promise and invitation."

(Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 137-9)

March 16, 2007