



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## A Lived Christianity

October 11, 2020

Romans 15:14-22

Clint Pressley

*<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. <sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, <sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; <sup>20</sup> and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, <sup>21</sup> but as it is written,*

*“Those who have never been told of him will see,  
and those who have never heard will understand.”*

*<sup>22</sup> This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.*

*(Pastor prays)*

We are 15 chapters into the book of Romans. If you're a guest with us, we've been going through this book almost two years now. By now you know we like to take things in their context. What was going on when Paul wrote this letter? Who is it written to? What is it about? What is the surrounding environment? Paul writes this letter to a small group of believers,

people like you and me. It was to a church like ours, just smaller; a church made up of different people from different backgrounds all held together with one common faith, a faith that is not a generalized faith but a specific faith in Jesus Christ. When I say faith in Jesus what I mean is faith in His perfect life, His death on the cross in the place of sinners, the miraculous resurrection and His ascension into Heaven. Believing in that saves people. That's what holds us together; not our backgrounds, not where we're from. Jesus.

The same is true for the church in Rome. Paul writes to this church in Rome. Who is this person writing? His name is Paul; he is the very first Christian missionary. He is the one who wrote most of the New Testament. You could flip into the back of your Bible and find the maps and there's probably a map that gives you Paul's missionary journey. What is the context? Paul writes to a church that is in this terrible city called Rome. The eternal city, Rome.

By the time this letter is written, Rome has conquered the world. It started out as a republic. And after the republic didn't work, some great strong men started to rise up. The first and most famous was Julius Caesar. After Julius Caesar, all of the Caesars would come from him or be adopted by him. They would get stronger and stronger and more decadent until we get to Caesar Augustus who was very bad and then his grandson, a man named Nero.

Nero was the emperor of Rome. And Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, which is amazing when you read Romans 13. Nero was a terrible man. He became emperor when he was 18 years old and he was held under the thumb of his mother Agrippina. She kept him down and directed his life until he became a man. And once he became a man, he had the power to do away with his mother, and so he did completely. He had her killed.

Caesar was a dangerous man; Nero was the most dangerous of them all. The woman he married became pregnant and, instead of celebrating her pregnancy, since he didn't want her or that baby, he kicked his pregnant wife to death. He was such a twisted man that after that happened he didn't want to be married but he wanted to be married to a man, as he dressed as a woman. Nero.

Something would happen in Rome in the mid 60's, the place would start to burn and as it did he knew, as the populist leader, he couldn't bear the burden. So he blamed the Christians. They would take the Christians and cover them with oil and light them on fire and illuminate his gardens. Or he would just have them crucified. Nero was a bad man.

Paul wrote to the church in Rome under the thumb of Nero. And as Paul's ministry came to a close, Rome was changing. And in this passage it's like he comes outside of the pulpit or the desk he's been teaching behind because the book of Romans is straight theology. You need to go and read it, know it, love it. There you'll find the Gospel of God explained completely.

But here in chapter 15, it's like he's closed his notes and walked out from behind the desk. And he leans against that desk and says, "I just want to be personal with you now." And here in this passage, you hear these words that are of great value. If you ever had a teacher that was really important to you or a professor that was just really exceptionally good and he or she would come outside the desk and sit down and just speak personally to you, that's what's going on right here. Paul is telling us this morning that...

### **Being a Christian is Real When Being a Christian is Lived**

Your Christianity is only as real as the life you are living for Jesus Christ. What Paul is doing here is getting his people ready. People that he did not know but people that he loved. Here is this church, that has been alive for 10 years now, and they're going into this time with this madman named Nero who would be the leader. Look, you think we've got bad politics now? And he's preparing their hearts for what's coming down the pike for them. And I think we need to hear the message this morning. I'll give you a couple of points; here's the first:

### **We need a deeper Christianity**

You and I need a deeper Christianity. The churches in the United States need a deeper Christianity. We need to throw off this shallow junk that people have been swimming in and we need to understand our faith and love it. We need a Christianity that permeates every single thing, who we are. So let's just walk through the passage. Let me just point out a couple of thoughts here this morning. Look at me like a tour guide. I'm not an expert. I'm just going to walk through it and will just point out some things in the text that might be interesting and may be helpful for you. Look with me if you will at verse 16 and think with me about what it means to be converted.

How do you understand what it means to actually become a Christian? I think we need to deepen how we view conversion. Look what he says in verse 16. I'll pick up in the middle of the sentence, verse 16. Paul writes, *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.* Now pause right there. When Paul starts talking about the Gentiles or what it means for them to be saved, he doesn't say they raised their hand. He doesn't say they signed a card. He doesn't say that they bowed their heads and then looked up at the preacher to indicate they made a decision for Jesus. You know what he said? He said to these Gentiles, they didn't just join a church. There's something on the inside that's happened to them. It's the word "sanctified." It means to be made holy. There's a transformation that's going on, on the inside.

That's not the only thing he said though. Come down to verse 18. As he talked about conversion, look what he says about the Gentiles and what happened when they were converted. Verse 18. *For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience.* Sanctification in verse 16, what happens on the *inside*. Obedience in verse 18, what happens on the *outside*.

When we start talking about Christianity it pains me to know the people who have either walked down the church aisle or been in a baptistry or have a certificate that says "you are a child of God," and nothing actually changed on the inside. We need a deeper view of what it means to actually be a Christian. Something's happening with the inside, sanctification, that is going to lead to something on the outside, which means obedience. I want us to get a deeper view of what it means to be a convert here at Hickory Grove.

And not only that. Let's go back to the very beginning. Let's go to verse 14. Come back with me. Just pull it back to verse 14 and there you're going to find four L's, you won't find it, I will give it to you. Four L's, I alliterated this one. Four L's that just may shed some light on verse 14. Verse 14 is Paul giving the church a compliment. Let's go to it and just read it.

*I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers.* That phrase "my brothers" could be translated to "my brothers and sisters." Paul says, in a personal way, *I myself am satisfied about you my brothers (and sisters) that you yourselves are full of goodness.* I would write it down as – ***lifestyle***. He's able to look at their lifestyle and say, "you are full of goodness."

What does it mean to be full of goodness? How can they be full of goodness? People are not naturally full of goodness. One of the wrong things we say sometimes and mean nice things by it, we might say, "Well you know, he's got a good heart." Do you have a son or daughter or you've got a friend that constantly stays in trouble, that is struggling with some sort of addiction, that is being thrown in jail, that's committing robbery? You have to keep bailing him out? And you're saying things like, "Well he gets in trouble, but he's got a good heart." The truth of the matter is, he does *not* have a good heart. Does not. People are not born naturally with a "good" heart. We are born just the opposite. We are naturally born with "bad" hearts. Hearts of stone, the Bible says, that need changing.

So it's not that we have got some good in us we just need to get, just need to work through some issues. The truth is you work through all the issues you want, keep digging. All you're going to find is *bad*. We need something to happen on the *inside*. And Paul is reflecting on the fact that there's been a lifestyle change. He's given all of this doctrine and theology; he backs up and says, "Now church, I just want you to know that you're full of goodness." How are they full of goodness? It's because of what Christ has done on the inside of you. You will be full of goodness when Jesus is Lord of your life; when your life has gone from being a heart of stone; but now it's a heart of flesh that has been changed. When you go from being in the dark to being in light; from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. Then you might be able to say, "full of goodness." Paul paid them a compliment about their lifestyle.

He does something else; there's another L in verse 14. He gives them a compliment about their **learning**. Notice what he says in verse 14. *You yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge*. Isn't it interesting that he talks about knowledge? We need to know some things. He takes his entire letter, this letter that is the book of Romans, I mean it took me two years to go through it, preaching it. I probably could have slowed way down and taken three years. John Piper took eight years. Martyn Lloyd Jones took 11 years. I mean this takes *forever* to go through. The book of Romans. Why? Because there's so much to mine out. Ours is a faith that is *of the book*. Our religion is a religion *of the book*. We believe that God has revealed Himself in nature and common grace. We believe He's shown us that there is a God there, but we believe He's revealed Himself directly in the book. We've tried to make it at Hickory Grove, so if you join this church and you just do the bare minimum of what it means to be a committed member of Hickory Grove, you come on Sunday morning and we open the Bible and we explain the Bible. We sing the Bible, we pray the Bible, so that you hear the word of God. If you go to

Sunday school then you're a part of a smaller group that is going to open the Bible, to be around the Bible. You have relationships that are centered on the Gospel. If you're in a Bible study, that would be the same. If you come on a Wednesday night to the pastor's class where we just sit down and open the Bible, we will have a Bible study, a smaller setting that is less formal. And we just walk through what the Bible says. If you bring your students, the students are going to go to student ministry that's not geared to *entertain* but to *expose* our students to the *Bible*. If you bring your children to Awana, Awana is geared in such a way it keeps taking our kids back to the *Bible*. If you take a step back and if you just take the basic approach to discipleship at Hickory Grove and you read the book we recommend once a month, you will be in the Bible. We have a Resource Center that will not make any money. In fact, it costs us to have that. That's there so that you can pick up a book once a month and read. If you follow along with just the basic reading plan of the Bible then you will have read the Bible once a year. You read 12 books a year, you'll get to know people in Sunday school, and you will hear doctrinal preaching that is exposition. And you will have some knowledge. One of our hopes is that we press toward being disciples, I mean the very word means "learner," someone who is receiving knowledge, not so you could be so smart but so that you could love Jesus so much. That's what knowledge is for. Paul says, I see your lifestyle and it's good. I want to press you toward learning.

There's another L you will find there in verse 14, it's the word, ***leaning***. Verse 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*. You yourselves are full of goodness, that's one. Filled with all knowledge, that's two. And are able to instruct one another. I used the word "lean" and not "learn" there. That phrase "instruct one another" really is the Greek word for counseling. To admonish one another. It means to have a friend so close to you that she can tell you everything about what's going on in her life. And you are walking with the Lord enough that you can then give some good advice to help direct that person. And Paul says to this church that's been here 10 years now, you don't need me to keep on doing things. You can instruct one another. You can have iron sharpening iron. It's the idea of an accountability group. Not just to meet together and talk about problems; an accountability group is to meet together so that the Gospel is pressed into our souls. And Paul says here, you can instruct one another like that. That's what this church is about. That's what it means to be a Christian who's growing

deeper. We need a deeper Christianity. One that's affecting our lifestyles, is helping us learn. That's pressing us to invest in one another. Deeper Christianity.

There's one other L I'll give you. A fourth L and that's in verse 15. Notice what he is reminding you about. Verse 15. *But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder.* OK, so think about where we are in the text. Chapter 15. All of the doctoral teaching is over, the teacher's come around the table and is sitting talking to the students and just says, "Ok, I have reminded you of something." So I started thinking, what does Paul remind us over and over and over again in Romans? And the answer is the Gospel. Paul takes the Gospel and he says, "Look, don't leave that back there in your conversion. Don't think you believe the Gospel so now you can move on." Paul keeps reminding over and over, does it boldly, take the Gospel of Jesus and take that Gospel like a healing balm and rub it into the wounds of your heart. This is what we believe about the Gospel. And when that happens, what happens to you is you start experiencing the **lordship** of Jesus in your life. You can sense that God is leading you. You see the power of Christ. You feel His lordship. You're submitting to His direction. All because you have tethered yourself to the Gospel. We need a deeper Christianity.

Let me give you a second thing to consider. Hopefully it will be helpful to you.

### **We need a war-time mentality**

Wartime mentality. It seems like it's late in the game to say that. We've been seven months in this pandemic. We're in this strange political hour. We're in this moment in history where there is so much tension. And I feel like there's been so much casual Christianity. We've done everything except pick up a war-time mentality. We need that. That begins with a couple of things; one is it begins with Gospel boldness.

### **Gospel boldness**

Join me again in verse 15. I'll pick up the word "bold" this time. <sup>15</sup> *But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder.* Paul says, "I've written to you boldly." You and I need Gospel boldness. Now what is Gospel boldness? I don't mean you need to be bold about what you believe politically. Which is fine, I'm not saying politics is not important. It is important. What I'm talking about is that you should be known more for the Lord you serve, the Lord Jesus, than the party you are part of. Jesus Christ is the dominant theme of your life. And Paul says, "That's what I have been saying over and over again." So you take that boldness you

might have for an opinion, and let's take it to the truth of God's word. We need Gospel boldness. Now when I say Gospel boldness, what I mean is you being willing to verbalize the Gospel of Christ, the goodness and holiness of God, the sinfulness and need of men, and the power of Jesus dying on the cross in the place of sinners. We need to have a war-time mentality that shows up in a Gospel boldness.

Let me give you another thing to consider here. Not just Gospel boldness, we need to marry this to Gospel boldness. And that is grace awareness.

### **Grace awareness**

Look what Paul says about himself. Sometimes we forget that we are products of grace. But look what it says in verse 15. *But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.* In other words, Paul is saying, "I know what you're thinking about me, 'who does that guy think he is to preach'?" Paul says, "I know I'm a product of grace." Paul brings it up over and over again: "I know where I came from."

If you don't know the story of Paul's life, go and read Acts chapters 8 and 9. And you see him on the road to Damascus, the actual change in his life. That after he had been a killer, a persecutor of Christians, God turned his life around and used him to be the most famous Christian the world has ever known. And Paul says all of that is a product of grace. Don't forget you are a product of grace before you start pointing at other people and you get so hard. Don't forget it's you, the product of grace. That you are a sinner, completely lost; you were dead in your sins. That you are without hope. You know what happens when you understand the depth of sin and the beauty of grace? You're much less judgmental of people. Paul says, after saying "I need to be bold," he very quickly says, "Look, I'm a product of grace."

And not only that, but you'll also see in verse 17 and verse 18, Paul speaks of his humility.

### **Genuine humility**

Do you see in verse 17 and 18, when Paul talked about ministering? He says, "Now look, I don't have any great corner on ministry." Look what he says in verse 17. *<sup>17</sup> In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. <sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.* That's genuine humility. That's him speaking



about how God has done this. I'm a product of grace. If people come to faith through the ministry God has given me, it is only by God's goodness.

And then notice what he does in verse 19. He uses that little phrase "by." He talked about how God works. I'll give you the first one. It's consistency.

### **Consistency**

You will see it in verses 18 & 19. We will start in verse 18. *For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience (here is the first by) —by word and deed,* If God is going to use you, if God is going to use me, there has to be consistency in my life. In other words when I preach the Gospel as the truth, I've got my doctrine laid out right. What it needs to be backed up by is my lifestyle. Paul says deeds are not enough. Mercy ministry, not enough. What we do at Operation Charlotte next week, not enough. That's a good platform. We've got to have deeds, but that is not Gospel. Those deeds are there to build the platform so that we can then actually share the saving message of Jesus Christ. It must be deed and word, word and deed. When you read this passage you hear it over and over again. It's word. I had to preach the word, had to tell them, they had to hear. How does it happen? It happens when we speak of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

I'll give you one more thought under this war-time mentality. And that is that it's a supernatural battle. It's spiritual. You might even write down "spiritual battle." I think we underestimate it.

I will go ahead and say that most of us in this room have underestimated the power of Satan and his minions and the power of God in our life. We have underestimated how much of what we deal with on a daily basis is a *spiritual* battle. I'm going to say it like this. *Everything* you deal with, *every single thing you deal with*, is at least on some level a *spiritual* battle. It certainly may be more. It might be psychological. It might be emotional. It might even be mental. It could be all those things too. I'm saying though it's at *least* a spiritual battle.

Paul seems to know that. He talked about word and deed but notice the two references to the spiritual battle in verse 19. I'll show it to you there. He says by word and deed in verse 18. And in verse 19, *by the power of signs and wonders*. Paul's there, preaching of Jesus' ministry; preaching the Gospel. When he preached the Gospel, he always did a miracle or sign; a sign to give authority to the message he is going to preach. Signs and wonders. When the apostles,

there only 12 apostles, one of whom committed suicide (he was replaced). Those 12 apostles had this power to have signs and wonders. The signs and wonders were there to give authority to the message of the Gospel before we had the Bible. Paul when he preached was able to perform signs and wonders. He had spiritual authority to give power to the Gospel message. They are always tied to the Gospel. Paul says, it was spiritual. Not only that, Look at verse 19. *by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.* Paul says, "Everything I did, everything I do, is a spiritual battle."

I want you to see the world like that. I want you to see that God has created us as spiritual beings. We need his power to do the work He's called us to do. We need to take on, this week, a war-time mentality.

I'd like to just press one last point, a third point, into your heart this morning.

That is that...

### **We need an open-handed view of life**

**Open-handed view of life.** I think you should make plans. I think you should press toward things. I think it's good to have a schedule. I think you ought to have goals in life. But sometimes when we lay out these plans, we do so with a closed hand. And I'm asking you to open your hand up a little bit this morning.

I want to show you something from Paul's life. I want you to see that he had a couple of things. One, is that Paul had right ambition. Right ambition. Do you have the right ambition? What's motivating you? Look at Paul's ambition in verse 20 and 21. Paul says, *and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,* and then it was in verse 21 for the 64<sup>th</sup> time, Paul quotes the Old testament for the last time in Romans. He quotes Isaiah, <sup>21</sup> *but as it is written,*

*"Those who have never been told of him will see,  
and those who have never heard will understand."*

You see what his ambition is? He says it plainly in verse 20. He was a pioneer missionary. I have one ambition. I want to go and preach where the Gospel has never been heard. That was his calling and his ambition and it was a good one.

That's not everybody's. That's not my ambition. I don't have a goal to go off where people haven't heard the Gospel and preach it there. That was Paul, it was good. Mine is to be a New Testament pastor at a local church for as long as God will let me. That's my goal.

All of us here have something that God has pressed on our life. You don't have to be a missionary or a preacher. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about *real* ambition. Ambition that is Godly, that is Christ-centered, that is exalting to the Lord. Do you have right ambition? Paul had dreams. Are you willing to subordinate your dreams?

One of the things we've cultivated in this society, especially the United States, is the ability to accumulate enough wealth that you can look forward down the road and have some dreams. You build a dream house, maybe live in a dream area, have a dream job. You have dreams for your future, and all of those things are fine. I'm not saying that you shouldn't have those. I'm asking you: are you willing to come open-handedly with your dreams that you've cultivated over time?

You see, Paul had this dream. You can hear it when you read Romans. He had this dream to go to Rome. He had it kinda planned out. I'm going to Rome and then I'm going to Espana or Spain. What would have happened if that man had gone through Europe with the Roman Road like it was? That was his dream. You know he had to go to Rome? He would go to Rome as a prisoner. He would be under the thumb of Nero. Probably die there. Do you know what else he had, this open-handed view of dreams? Paul had this joyful view of providence. You know his dream never did work out. We actually don't know what happened to Paul. His dream didn't work out. He didn't get to Rome. And look down there in verse 22 and feel what he's saying. After explaining his ministry from Jerusalem to Illyricum, saying his call, his ambition, "this is what I've been doing all of these years" and then verse 22 gives us a little editorial note. <sup>22</sup> *This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.* I wanted to come there, it's my dream to come there, but I've been hindered. And you know who's doing the hindering? It's God. And yet Paul has this joyful view of his ministry; I've been shipwrecked, been drugged, I've been beaten, I've been insulted. I've got the marks of a Christian on my body. I have been over in Galatia. Do you know those Galatians? But I wouldn't trade it for anything because this is what God has had me doing.

Do you know the doctrine of Providence? Do you love the doctrine of God's Providence in your life? I think God has called us to develop a deeper Christianity. Let's reject anything shallow. I think God has called us, in the name of Jesus, to have this war-time mentality. That everything is spiritual. I'm living my life as a spiritual battle and doing so in humility. I'm taking every thought captive. I think God, in the name of Jesus, has called us today to come with our dreams, open-handedly. To come to Him and say, "Lord you know my dreams, this is what I want to do but I'm not holding on tight to that. I'm opening my hand to that. I'm saying here's my life Lord, you take it and be honored in my life." That's being a Christian. And being a Christian is *real* when being a Christian is *lived*.

As we close today, I'm just gonna ask you for a moment to bow your head, and this is how we will close. I'm going to ask you a couple of questions with this fresh on our minds. Are you living out your profession? Think with me. What needs to change, what sins do you need to confess, what attitude needs to go from you? What are you holding onto so tightly to today that you actually need to let go of or at least be willing to let go of? What dream have you pursued that has really disturbed you? You've not gotten there yet and it's keeping you from living out God's good will for your life? Do you have a war-time mentality? Have you come to God and openly and rightly, genuinely said, "Lord, here is my life and I will do anything you call me to do"? In a few moments we're going to sing; as we do, it's a good time for you to use that as worship: singing to the Lord with your heart. Let us develop through worship a deeper Christianity.

Father, thank you for your goodness. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for a church to serve. Use us for the glory of your Kingdom and the good of the Gospel. In Jesus' name, Amen.