

*From the pulpit of*



## **Pervasive Gospel**

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**Roman 15:14-21**

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At EBF we have a certain Ethos that describes who we are and who we want to become as followers of Jesus Christ. The Ethos is summed up in our five Ethos Statements. Let me give you an overview. Humble Orthodoxy, Abiding Worship, Missional Community, Invested Sojourner, and Pervasive Gospel. This morning we will take a closer look at Pervasive Gospel as we look at a passage from the book of Romans.

At EBF we want to cultivate a culture of a pervasive Gospel. A culture full of people who are all about growing in the Gospel and who want to see others impacted by the Gospel locally and globally. This culture of a pervasive Gospel is what the Apostle Paul was cultivating in the church in Rome. His letter focused on the Good News of Jesus and how the church could grow and see the Gospel spread. Paul says in verse 20, “I make it my ambition to preach the Gospel.” The specifics of his ambition had him preaching the Gospel in areas in which people had never heard of Jesus. You may never go to unreached people in faraway lands, but it should still be your ambition to share the Gospel with others. Part of your mission as a believer is to interact with others who don’t know the love of God in Christ and to share it with them. People need to know the Gospel; that God loves them so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross to provide a way for sinners to be reconciled to Him by faith. Those of us who have been impacted by the love of God in Christ should be eager to share it with those who do not follow Jesus.

As a church, we can’t lose evangelistic zeal and fervor. At the present time it is not very cool or trendy within the church to be about sharing the Gospel. The elevated talk these days is on ministries of mercy and justice (Which is good). I am all-in for this ministry, but we must not leave out Gospel proclamation. We can physically help people all day long, but if we ignore their most pressing need - to be reconciled to God, who stands against them and will not accept them – then we can’t say we really love them. Pastor Matt Chandler wrote a book entitled *The Explicit Gospel* in which he points to the dangers of losing evangelism. He says, “If we lose evangelism, we may as well be the Peace Corps, helping people in the here and now, but not giving two cents if they go to hell.” Because we care about the eternal destiny of humans, we want to make it our ambition to tell them about Jesus. And because we love them, we tell them that there is hope through the Gospel. That is why we want the Gospel to pervade our church and then move through us to the rest of the world. That’s what Paul is doing and that is what we want to look at today. We will see six points concerning the Gospel.

1. Gospel Atmosphere. Romans 15:14-15a: “I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct

one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder...” A lot of the churches to whom Paul wrote had major issues, but not the church in Rome. Rome had some issues of the Gentiles and Jews getting along. But Paul mainly wrote to them to stir them up and remind them of the Gospel truth. Paul was ‘satisfied’ in what he had heard about their conduct and sound doctrine. They were ‘full of ‘goodness’ in living out the Gospel. They were ‘filled with all knowledge’ of the truth of God’s Word and they were able to ‘instruct one another.’ They built one another up in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This church had an atmosphere of embracing and living in the Gospel. If we want to see the Gospel expand out of our church, we must first have an atmosphere that embraces and lives in the Gospel.

What atmosphere are we cultivating in our church and in our Ethos Communities? Is it one that is about embracing and living in the Gospel? If so, our times together should be both lively and weighty. Let me explain what I mean. The Federal Reserve at times holds meetings to determine whether or not to take action to try and spur the growth of the economy. Think about these important financial leaders gathering together to make decisions that could impact an entire nation and even impact the world. This is their specialty and passion and I am sure the discussions are lively, as the matter is very weighty. Yet, as a church, we deal with matters of greater and more eternal significance. No matter whatever else we are into, the Gospel of Jesus must be our main focus. Our Ethos Community meetings should stir us up to the importance of the Gospel that we have embraced and live in. Our time together should be lively and weighty as we get together in an atmosphere of embracing and living in the Gospel.

2. Gospel Calling. Verses 15-16a: “But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God [16] to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles...” God gave Paul a specific and special grace to minister to the Gentiles (‘peculiar’)<sup>1</sup>. One loose translation says that God gave Paul a ‘highly focused assignment.’<sup>2</sup> It was Paul’s specific calling to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles who had never heard. Of course he still preached to Jews, but his specific calling from God was to the Gentiles. You will often hear missionaries speak in these terms. They will tell stories of God calling them to reach a specific people group in a certain region of the world. What they often mean by that is that they have a great burden to bring the Gospel to a certain people. But this type of specific calling is not just for missionaries. It can be for all of us. Perhaps God has given you a burden to reach athletes or nurses. It doesn’t mean that you don’t speak to the uncoordinated or doctors, but your heart and calling in life has you focusing on a specific people group.

Maybe you don’t have such a call or burden, or maybe you have failed to see the obvious connections in your life. Take your passions or career and notice with whom you rub shoulders. If you are a nurse, God has a call on your life to do that work for His glory. At the same time, He has put you around a lot of nurses. Those are the people God wants you to reach with the Gospel. It’s not about the church getting a calling to reach the lost people in your life, but about you opening your eyes to the people God has put around you to reach with the Gospel. You are around people who will never come to church, but they would listen to you talk about Jesus who changed your life. Go ahead and think about just one person who runs in the same circles as you and you know they will never come to church no matter what we do. It’s your Gospel calling to recognize the specific people God has put around you with whom you should share the Gospel.

3. Gospel Worship. Verse 16: “...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,

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<sup>1</sup>William R. Newell, *Romans verse by verse*, page 533.

<sup>2</sup> *The Message*, page 334.

sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Paul views his Gospel preaching among the Gentiles like that of a priest. The Old Testament priest would be involved in animal sacrifices, but Paul was a priest who preached the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Those Gentiles who embraced the sacrifice of Christ would be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, acceptable to God and sanctified by the Spirit. It is through Paul’s priestly service of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles that those who respond are offered up to God as good pleasing sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2). In a sense, Paul’s evangelism was worship and an offering of a pleasing sacrifice (Isaiah 66:20).

In a similar way, each of us as believers are called ‘priests,’ the priesthood of all believers, in which we offer spiritual sacrifices and worship to God (1 Peter 2:5). We speak of singing in worship to God and offering up our tithes and offerings as worship. When people respond to our Gospel message, we offer them up as acceptable to God as they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and made holy by the Spirit. What an amazing act of worship. I can guilt you into evangelism all day long and the movement might last for a season, but when you grasp the concept of evangelism as worship to God, then perhaps that will have a lasting effect.

4. Gospel Power. Verses 17-18: “In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. [18] 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...” Paul mentions that he is proud of his work for God. That might make us uncomfortable when someone talks about how they are proud of their work for God. Paul was never shy about the effort he exerted on behalf of the Gospel, but he always couched it in terms that it was not his effort or power, but God’s (Colossians 1:29; 1 Corinthians 15:10). In fact, he won’t even bring up anything else except ‘what Christ has accomplished through me.’ He spoke the Word of the Gospel and he also performed mighty deeds.

Look at the deeds in verse 19: “...by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...” As he preached the Gospel, miracles occurred in casting out demons and healing the sick (Acts 19:11). I love it that it says that these occurred ‘by the power of the Spirit of God.’ God used these signs and wonders to authenticate the Gospel message ‘by the power of the Spirit of God.’ Now, there is a lot of debate among Christians whether or not signs and wonders happen today. Some say they were just used initially to confirm the apostolic preaching of the Gospel and others say that they are to be manifested today as well. My thoughts about these things go along these lines: The context is evangelism, not whether God can still heal or not (we pray for healing in our church). In the evangelism of the early church, there seems to be a special moving of the Spirit in power to authenticate the message that many of us do not experience today. That being said, I believe that as we share the Gospel, the ‘power of the Spirit of God’ will be manifested. The Spirit’s power will be manifested in our boldness, in opening blind eyes, in breaking hard hearts, in bringing people to repentance and faith and perhaps even in healing and casting out demons. We are not here to try to determine ‘the power of the Spirit of God’; we just want to be used so that ‘the power of the Spirit of God’ can work through us as we share our faith.

5. Gospel Vision. Notice in the rest of verse 19 the grandness of Paul’s Gospel vision. “...so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ...” Now, I want you to grasp just how enormous this Gospel vision was for the Apostle Paul. His vision was to share the Gospel and plant churches from the borders of Jerusalem to Illyricum. Illyricum is around modern day Albania. This is an area of about 1,400 miles. That is a huge Gospel vision and in Paul’s mind, it was accomplished. In Paul’s mind he had already accomplished and ‘fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.’ In verse 23 Paul

says, "...I no longer have any room for work in these regions." God did it through His power. It's okay to have huge God-sized goals. It's okay to have these huge God-sized goals of reaching people for Christ. It's okay to have huge God-sized goals that only God can pull off.

6. Gospel Ambition. Let's finish up by looking at Paul's Gospel ambition. Verses 20-21: "...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, [21] but as it is written, 'Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.'" Some of you literally have the same ambition as Paul, to preach the Gospel 'not where Christ has already been named.' Your ambition is to go to those around the world who have never heard of Christ. You want the reality of this quote here from Isaiah 52:15 to be your experience. You want to preach the crucified Messiah to the nations who have never heard, so that they can see and understand the Gospel. Like the apostle Paul, it is your drive and ambition to bring them the Gospel. Just to let you know, we are with you. Most of us may stay among the more reached, but we want to always have a heart for the unreached.

Sometimes I can feel bummed out that I am not living among the unreached. Some of our favorite family worship videos are entitled "Dispatches from the Front." It is a DVD series that highlights the Gospel spreading all over the world. One video was about India. It was about the Gospel spreading all over India, even into remote parts where people were risking their lives. I wish I could do that. I was a little disappointed that I could not go to India and spread the Gospel and risk my life. About an hour later, I was outside with my family and we were chatting it up with the neighbors. A woman, whom we had never seen before, walked by on the other side of the street pushing her child in a stroller. My wife and I waved to her, almost like flagging her down to come and meet us and talk. She eagerly came over and talked with us. Guess where she was from? India. No joke. Now, it would be a great story if we shared the Gospel and she repented right there, but at this point God was showing me something. If it is your heart's desire to spread the Gospel and you can't go somewhere far away, don't be surprised if God will plopp opportunities right into your lap. No matter where we live or our situation in life, we want to make it our ambition to preach the Gospel. Other ambitions may try to sneak in and distract, but we have to intentionally make this our ambition to preach the Gospel. This ambition is cultivated in a community atmosphere saturated with the Gospel.

To sum up it up: Gospel Atmosphere: We want to be a church that cultivates an atmosphere of embracing and living in the Gospel. Gospel Calling: To recognize the specific people God has put us around to share the Gospel. Gospel Worship: Our evangelistic efforts can be seen as worship to God by offering people as new creations in Christ. Gospel Power: We exert effort in bringing the Gospel, but ultimately it's all about the power of the Spirit of God. Gospel Vision: It's okay to have huge God-sized goals of reaching people for Christ that only He can pull off. Gospel Ambition: Whether we live among the reached or the unreached, we want to make it our ambition to preach the Gospel.

This is the Pervasive Gospel that we want to permeate our hearts and our church. So, what should you do? How about sharing the Gospel with at least one person this week? Pray right now about who needs to hear about God's love for them in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and pray for boldness to share with them. I heard a Christian woman from Albania sum up her simple 3-step evangelistic approach like this: Pray, meet people, and tell them about Jesus. Let's go ahead and start with prayer. Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Evanston Bible Fellowship, Evanston, Illinois, by Pastor Jason Lancaster on Sunday, August 28, 2016. It is not meant to be a polished essay or substitute for personal Bible study. Evanston Bible Fellowship is a community of sojourners empowering one another to cultivate Gospel transformation.