

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 me 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.

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. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. (NIV84)

Theme: Since we are made Acceptable by the Holy Spirit

1. So we boast in Christ.
2. So we spread his gospel.

When Jesus ascended into heaven he told his disciples not to do anything—at first anyway. They were to go to Jerusalem and just wait—wait for the Holy Spirit to come. You can think of those 10 days as the calm before the storm. For once the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost they did as Jesus also told them—they went throughout the world to spread the message of the gospel.

We do the same. For the Holy Spirit has made us acceptable in the eyes of God. And because he has done this we boast in Christ and we spread his gospel

Our sinful nature has a problem with our theme—that Christ makes us acceptable. For we have the tendency to think that we are pretty good in and of ourselves. We think highly of ourselves. We are proud of who we are. Sure we may have made some mistakes. But overall we are pretty proud of our lives.

But what about God? What does he think of us? **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. There is no one who is righteous, not even one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All have turned away, they have together become corrupt.** Those are just four verses—we could go on and on. God isn't impressed with us. God is not pleased with us because of sin and our sinful nature. By nature we are not acceptable to him.

But here we are at the end of Easter. Another half of the Church year is drawing to a close. Next week is the last Sunday of the festival half of the Church year, which is all about Christ. It starts with the season of Advent, and ends with the day of Pentecost. So it begins with Jesus giving up the glories and riches of heaven to live in the womb of a virgin. It covers Jesus' birth—true God and yet true man. During the season of Epiphany Jesus taught his disciples, performed miracles, and cast out demons. He proved that he truly is God.

Then came the season of Lent. Christ willingly went to his death. Taking our sins upon himself while on the cross. Suffering through hell in our place. And making us perfect. Then three days after he died came Easter. Jesus rose from the dead, defeated death, and crushed Satan's head. We've been basking in this victory for seven weeks now. Through Christ's work we have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Christ has done all these things for us. And so we want to boast about his work. That's what we want to do, but we often fail to do so. No, our boasting is often about ourselves. We focus on what we have accomplished. We brag about what we have done. We usually focus on ourselves or those close to us. Just think about your facebook posts. Or your conversations with others. Perhaps around Christmas and Easter, you might write something about what Christ has done—maybe. But other than that your life is consumed with what you have done—what your accomplishments are. You post a picture of the meal you just made or ate. You boast about many things you have done or seen, or that of your friends and family. But Christ and his amazing work rarely get a mention.

Some might even take credit for what Christ has done. They claim that we are saved by what we do. That our works and our character

can earn eternal life—not that Christ has learned it for us. Others say that we have to add to Christ’s work to be saved. As if Christ’s work isn’t good enough. So the credit and the boasting comes back to us and not to Christ who actually paid the full price for our sins. As we read in 1 John 1, **The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

Others want to take credit for coming to faith. They talk about making the decision for Christ. They say it’s a choice that we make. So we must accept Christ into our hearts. Then our eternal life depends on something we do—on a decision we made. But that’s a decision would could never make. For we are enemies of God by nature who hate him. No, Christ chose us and brought us to faith. As he says in John 15, **you did not choose me, but I chose you.**

So it is Christ’s work, not ours, the leads God to look upon us with favor. It is Jesus who makes us acceptable before God. Because of Christ we are no longer sinners in God’s eyes. For Christ has given us his perfection—his holiness. So when God looks at us he know longer sees sinful human beings, his enemies who want nothing to do with him. He sees those who are pure and holy, just like his Son. It is Christ and him alone by which we are saved. He alone makes us acceptable.

So we brag about him. We boast about his work. We put the focus on him. We want others to notice what he has done. To see all that he has accomplished for us. That’s what Paul said in verse 17, **I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.** Really that verse is better translated as the HCSB does, **Therefore I have reason to boast in Christ Jesus regarding what pertains to God.** Paul gloried or boasted about Christ. For he has done all things for us.

Christ has paid the price for the sins of the whole world. And thus he makes us acceptable to God. But only those who believe receive the blessings Christ has won for us. Therefore we are motivated to spread his Word.

It is Christ who gets the credit for choosing us and bringing us to faith. It is Christ who sends the Holy Spirit to work faith into our hearts. Next week is the day of Pentecost. On that day Peter preached a sermon about the life and death of Christ. Through that sermon 3000

people were brought to faith. The Holy Spirit worked through the gospel spread by Peter and many became believers. And so it is the Holy Spirit who makes us acceptable to God. For it is through faith that we receive the blessings Christ won for us. Through faith in him we are made holy, or sanctified. Through faith we are sanctified. The Holy Spirit does this through a specific means. The means of grace. That is, the gospel in Word and sacraments. Wherever the gospel is the Holy Spirit is at work. When the Word is spread the Holy Spirit is either creating faith or strengthening faith. Could he work through other means? Sure; but he doesn’t. He works through the Word and the sacraments of baptism and communion. Those are the means and nothing else.

What does this mean for us? It means the gospel must be spread. For no one can believe unless they hear the gospel or are baptized. As Paul says in Romans 10, **How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?** But that can’t happen if no one spreads the Word. If we are too busy bragging about ourselves and boasting in our own accomplishments, then no one will believe.

And yet that is often what happens. We get so focused on ourselves. We get caught up in our lives. And we forget about Christ. We fail to spread his Word. We can offer any number of excuses. We don’t know what to say, we are afraid we’d mess up, we are afraid of what others may think of us. But the bottom line often is that we are too concerned with ourselves and our lives to think about those who don’t know Christ. We are too busy boasting about ourselves to boast about Christ.

But that wasn’t Paul. He made it his life to spread the gospel. The book of Acts records three missionary journeys by Paul. Our second lesson for today was written during his second missionary journey. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans at the end of his third missionary journey. During these journeys he went throughout the Mediterranean world sharing the message of God’s compassion. He risked his life for it. He was flogged, stoned, imprisoned, thrown in jail, shipwrecked, and much more. Paul often spread the gospel without getting pay. He was forced to work as a tent maker just to get by. Paul made it his life

to spread the gospel. And not just because he was made an Apostle by Christ, but because he experienced God's grace first hand. For while Paul was persecuting Christians, Jesus appeared to him, brought him to faith, and led him to spread the gospel. Paul knew it was God's grace—not just that he was a Christian, but it was also God's grace that he was allowed to spread the gospel.

So his life was consumed with it. As we see in our text for today, Paul longed to go to Spain. He wanted to go to a place that had yet to hear the gospel. He had a deep passion for seeking and saving the lost. He was one of them for much of his life. He could remember what it was like to live a life of darkness. He could vividly remember not being acceptable to God. So he wanted everyone to know the grace of God.

He wanted all to hear the gospel and be acceptable through faith. And the same stands for us. For like Paul, we too were objects of God's wrath. And we know many who still are. We know many who don't know Christ—who don't believe in him. So like Paul was want to save the lost. So we spread the gospel. And when Paul spread the gospel to the Gentiles many were brought to faith. And they in turn praised God and obeyed him. And so we spread the gospel as well. We spread the gospel so that many others may be made acceptable in God's eyes. We spread the gospel so that others may praise and obey the world's one and only Savior.

At his ascension Christ may have told his disciples to do nothing until Pentecost, but after the Holy Spirit came they went throughout the world spreading the gospel. Here, at the end of Easter, at the end of the festival half of the Church year, we have seen Christ's work. We know that it is Christ who makes us acceptable. Through faith we receive everything he has done for us. And this faith is worked in us by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. So let us follow the examples of the Apostles. Let us boast of Christ. Let us spread the gospel. So the Holy Spirit can make many more acceptable before God through the work of Christ. Amen.