



Can we talk about basketball for a moment? How about our Golden State Warriors, a team that has electrified the nation with their 92 game winning season and 2-time MVP winner Stef Curry? A team that defied the NBA formula of recent years which was: give your one superstar the ball, clear the floor and let him score. Because the Warriors win by implementing a different approach, a team approach. They're known to pass the ball eight or nine times in one possession until an open man has an easy shot. They are described as completely unselfish. Each player has a distinct and important role. They rely upon each other.

Our passage of scripture today is all about teamwork—God's Team. Our verses today are descriptive as they answer the question, Why is everybody important on God's Team, the Church?

The concept of teamwork isn't unique to God's team; the best coaches have tapped into the multiplying power of teamwork. As an example of how a great coach thinks about the power of teamwork, consider the approach of Dean Smith. He coached for 36 years at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, led his team to two National Championships and eleven appearances in the Final Four. The Basketball Hall of Fame called Coach Smith a "coaching legend." This guy knew how to lead people to work together as a team!

Dr. Jerry Bell said, "Part of Dean Smith's greatness as a leader lies in his ability to get his players to get beyond understanding their roles to embracing them. (I hope that I will help you embrace your role on God's team this morning.) But their (players) commitment starts with clarity. If employees (or players or people) don't understand their roles, their specific areas of responsibility, it's almost impossible for the company (the team or the church) to work well as a team. Confusion will reign. Divided responsibility ends up being nobody's responsibility." Coach Phil Jackson said, "Good teams become great ones when the members trust each other enough to surrender the Me for the We."

Both of these great coaches describe attitudes and techniques that we can learn from as we strive to function as a great team. But they don't have access to the greatest multiplying effect that we have—the Holy Spirit! He supernaturally uses us, his people, to change the world to the glory of God when we function like a great team.

As we study these verses of scripture today, we're going to see that everyone in the church has a unique and important role to play on God's team. I've structured this sermon into two points:

- » Paul's unique role on God's team (verses 16-22)
- » Every Christian has a role on God's team (verses 23-33)

My prayer for each of you is to know your role, embrace it and work in synergy with others to increasingly show God's glory. Turn with me to Romans 15.

Paul's Unique Role on God's Team

What was Paul's role and why was it unique? To preach to the Gentiles.

"... to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He (Jesus) gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God" (v. 16).

Paul's role on God's Team was to go to the Gentiles and explain to them that they were sinners and that Jesus could be their Savior. Paul was very clear on his role and he understood that Jesus gave him this role. Paul is highly focused as he preached to the Gentiles .

"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God" (v. 18).

This reveals an intensity of focus that Paul possessed. No doubt he talked about topics other than the Gospel. But his mind was normally and usually occupied with his burning desire to share the good news of Jesus with unsaved people.

Why was Paul's role unique? Paul accomplishes his role by his words and his deeds. His ministry of preaching was accompanied by powerful demonstrations. Verses 18-19 tell us that Paul filled his role to reach the Gentiles,

"... by the power of signs and wonders through the power of the Spirit of God."

To bring validation to Paul's preaching, the Holy Spirit would heal people or drive out demons or some other miraculous sign. This was a unique and special time for God's team. The church was just starting, the New Testament was just being written, and God used these miraculous signs and wonders to prove the Apostles preaching was legitimate.

Another unique aspect to Paul's ministry was his approach to go to unreached places. Paul says in verse 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."

Paul didn't stay at one church for 20 years. He didn't settle in. His role on God's team was to keep moving. This doesn't mean that staying in a specific church or city for 20+ years is wrong; not at all! It just reveals how unique Paul's role was.

The last unique description of Paul's ministry is seen in verse 19 as he says that his work is complete if major cities had a church.

"So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ."

According to the role that Paul played on God's team, he was done. He had fully proclaimed the gospel in these regions. But there were lots of rural towns and smaller cities in these areas that didn't have a church yet. But Paul's role and calling was to go to the major cities, plant a church, establish elders, and then let them continue the work of discipleship and evangelism in their region. Meanwhile, Paul would move on to another major city to repeat the pattern. This was Paul's position on God's Team.

Others have had such a unique role, like Hudson Taylor. He felt God's call to go to China to preach the Gospel to the unsaved people throughout that country. In the 1800s when Hudson went to China it was a land where *"Christ was not known"* (v. 20). Through his work the China Inland Ministry was established and hundreds of missionaries were sent through the land preaching about Jesus. We have missionaries from our church who do this as well. They've gone to live in Thailand, Greece or Berkeley to share the message of Christ because they heard the same call from God, "This is your role on the team."

A role like this isn't for everyone; in fact, it isn't for most. But it is for some. Maybe your role on God's team would be an unusual role like Paul's or Hudson Taylor's or one of our missionaries. How could you know? A common experience for these pioneering men and women is a burning desire placed in their heart by the Holy Spirit. It's as if they would read,

"... 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" (v. 20).

The Spirit of God would say to them, "this is you." They have an overwhelming, inescapable passion to go and take the gospel message of Jesus to unreached places.

This involved a high cost to Paul. He sacrificed family and the normal desires a man would have to settle down with a wife and raise children. He sacrificed long-term friendships that people enjoy after living in a city for 25 years. He sacrificed the stabilizing factors that many people today expect: home ownership,

retirement, predictable schedules and plans. But these kinds of sacrifices are small in comparison to the great calling that God places in their hearts.

I have always had a bit of this pioneering approach to ministry. I recall that as seminary graduation was approaching the common conversation involved plans and employment after graduation. I had a wide-open approach to this; wherever God would lead, I'd go, anywhere in the world. And I wanted to live in a place where there wasn't a church on every corner. It took me by surprise that everyone else didn't share my approach. Many of them were moving back to their hometown and joining the staff of the church they grew up in.

Different callings for different people. Each of us should know and embrace our role on God's team. Is God calling you to a role on his team that involves taking the Gospel to an unreached place? Since we all live in cities where less than 5% of the people know Jesus, this is part of all of our lives. We are all ambassadors for Jesus and called to share his gospel.

But some of you might feel a unique calling to this in a way that's more intense. If that's you, follow that vision with unwavering passion. That's your role on God's team and the church needs you to do your role well. You might feel discouraged and alone sometimes. You might wish everyone else had your level of passion and buy-in. Don't get distracted by such trivial matters. Fix your eyes on Jesus, know your role and play it well.

As I've mentioned, Paul had a very important role but it was an unusual one. As we look in this next section of verses, let me point out that:

Every Christian has a Role on God's Team

"For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings" (verses 26-27).

The Christians in the areas of Macedonia and Achaia have a different role than Paul. The vast majority of them lived in the same town their entire lives. They settled into their society and hopefully lived faithfully with service and love. They are also playing the role of giving financially to support people who were suffering in Jerusalem. This is an important role on God's team.

As flashy and exciting as it is to hear about Paul's life and adventures, he couldn't live his life without the financial support and financial involvement of Christians. It's like Paul is willing to crash the lane for a dunk but he needs his team to assist him by passing the ball. Financial giving is a necessary position to play on God's team.

Like all of the roles on God's Team, Jesus will call some of you to the role of giving more than other people. There's no man-centered pressure about this; God will plant the desire in your heart. *"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Cor. 9:7).

Is God calling you to a role on his team that involves providing the finances for God's work? This is a vital role; someone has to fund the ones called to **go**. For sure, the scriptures call all of us to give financially, just like the scriptures call all of us to live as an ambassador. But there's another role of providing the financial support to accelerate God's work in special ways.

- Giving money to support our church's missionaries.
- Giving money to support a child with Compassion International.
- Giving money to pay for a child to attend school in San Francisco with City Impact.
- Giving money to pay for the North and South Campus to secure new facilities.

This is a vital role to be played on God's team and in our church as we are working toward Vision 2020. The church in Rome also played some different roles on God's team. Paul says,

"I play to do so (visit you) when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while" (v. 24).

"I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, so that I may come to you with joy by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen" (verses 29-33).

In these verses Paul describes three more roles on God's Team. He wants the Christians in Rome to assist him (v. 24) and provide a time of refreshment (v. 32). What would assistance look like? Meeting physical needs—supplies, money for travel, travel companions, letters of introduction. What would refreshment look like? Friendship, conversations, physical rest, laughter, empathy and understanding.

Both of these are important roles on God's team. Paul needs this from them. This is one of the fuels for his heart. He is strengthened for his work by their assistance and refreshment. Is God calling you to a role on his team that involves assistance and refreshment? Again, all of us do this to a degree but some of you

are uniquely gifted and suited for this. If these are your roles on God's team, embrace them and flourish in your role.

The third role some people in the Rome church play is prayer. He begs them to pray for him.

"I urge you (I beg you), brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me" (v. 30).

Paul knows his work is dangerous physically so he needs their prayers. Paul knows his work is spiritually impossible without the activity of the Holy Spirit, so he asks for their prayers. Prayer brings supernatural action to God's plans. Prayer isn't meant to be a ritual we do before a meal or a habit done before we go to sleep. Prayer is meant to be an activity of Christians to connect us to the heart of God and activate the work of God. Praying is a necessary position on God's Team.

Epaphras was a man called to this position on God's team. Look how he's described in Colossians 4:12. *"Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured."* He prayed with such passion and devotion because he believed God did powerful work when people prayed.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). Is God calling you to a role on his team that involves supporting people in prayer? No doubt, all of us are called to do this but some of you are uniquely gifted, called and suited for this. If this is your role on God's team, embrace it and flourish in your role.

God's work in the world will never be accomplished by one superstar. It's done through all of us, the body of Christ, playing our part. Turn to the person sitting next to you and tell them, "God's work is accomplished through all of us." Everyone in the church, that means every one of you, has a unique and important role to play on God's team.

I've used the construct of roles on a team to illustrate this today because we all understand how a great team functions. Think about the different roles that are described in this passage:

- Someone has to "go" – that's Paul.
- Someone has to give financially – that's the people from the churches in Macedonia, Achaia and Rome.
- Someone has to assist Paul emotionally – that's some people from the church in Rome.
- Someone has to support Paul through prayer – people from the church in Rome and throughout the cities Paul has visited.

Jesus, being our head coach, always knows the best. When we all look to him to fill our roles and work together, we experience the win, which brings more glory to God.

Let me conclude with another quote from Coach Dean Smith because it describes how we function together as a team and it describes how Jesus coaches us.

“Getting your athletes to accept their roles is one of the biggest challenges of coaching. Your starters typically don’t have much problem with their roles however it’s a different story for your

subs - especially if their parents and friends are telling them they deserve to be playing.

“Once preseason is over and you are fairly set on your athletes’ roles, invest the time to sit down with each of them to discuss and clarify their roles. Let them know where they stand and the two or three things you will need and expect from them this season to be contributing members of the team.”

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.