

Romans 15:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation:

Analysis

Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named (οὕτως δὲ φιλοτιμούμενον εὐαγγελίζεσθαι οὐχ ὅπου ὀνομάσθη Χριστός, houtōs de philotimoumenon euangelizesthai ouch hopou ōnomasthē Christos)—Philotimoumenon (strived, made it my ambition) indicates deliberate strategic focus. Paul's missionary principle was pioneer evangelism: preaching where Christ was not yet named (ouch hopou ōnomasthē Christos). He prioritized unreached regions over established churches. This wasn't arrogance but recognition of his specific calling: apostolic church-planting among Gentiles, not pastoral nurture of existing congregations.

Lest I should build upon another man's foundation (ἴνα μὴ ἐπ' ἀλλότριον θεμέλιον οἰκοδομῶ, hina mē ep' allotrion themelion oikodomō)—Themelion (foundation) is Christ himself (1 Cor 3:11) and the apostolic testimony about Christ (Eph 2:20). Paul avoided building (oikodomō) where others had laid foundations—not from competitiveness but from missional focus. He left pastoral work to others (like Apollos, 1 Cor 3:6) while he pressed into unreached territory. This models strategic mission: diverse callings working complementarily.

Historical Context

Paul's pioneer principle explains why he wrote to Rome (a church he didn't plant) but planned only to visit briefly (vv. 23-24, 28-29) en route to Spain—new territory.

This also explains his lengthy Ephesian ministry (Acts 19-20) versus brief stops elsewhere: Ephesus was strategic for reaching Asia Minor. His missionary strategy was intentional, not haphazard.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's ambition to preach where Christ is not yet named challenge or inform contemporary missionary strategy and personal evangelistic priorities?
2. What is the difference between Paul's avoidance of building on others' foundations and inappropriate competition among Christian workers today?
3. In your ministry context, are you called to pioneer work (planting/evangelism) or building work (pastoral care/discipleship), and how do you know?

Interlinear Text

οὕτως δὲ φιλοτιμούμενον εὐαγγελίζεσθαι οὐχ ὅπου
so Yea have I strived to preach the gospel not where
G3779 G1161 G5389 G2097 G3756 G3699

ὤνομάσθη Χριστός ἵνα μὴ ἐπ' ἀλλότριον θεμέλιον
was named Christ G2443 G3361 upon another man's foundation
G3687 G5547 G1909 G245 G2310

οἰκοδομῶ

I should build

G3618