

Romans 1:7-15

In this passage we are going to see the motivations of Paul, the minister. We are going to have a very good example to follow. We will gain some insight about true spiritual ministry and service, as opposed to fleshly acts. And we will learn about Paul's realistic expectations in ministry. So there is much here to learn from, in a passage that is mostly used as an introduction.

7To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First off we have an example of what we have mentioned before. When you see the word all, you must look at the context to know what it refers to. In this case it refers to all the believers in Rome. Not to all who live in Rome.

Beloved of God and called saints are both describing the same people. They are synonyms of Christians.

A Christian is someone who is beloved of God. I John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! We also know from Romans that nothing can separate us from God's love. Do you see yourself as someone who God loves? If you are a believer, that is a truth you can bank on. You are the beloved of God, his bride.

Called to be saints, or simply, called saints.

Saints- hagios Thayer Definition: 1) most holy thing, a saint This carries with it the idea of being separated for God's use. Just like Paul said of himself regarding his assignment of preaching the gospel. Paul was called as an apostle separated for the gospel. All believers are called of Christ and separated as saints.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. What a fitting greeting for believers. Now Paul is talking about the general Charis of God, the unmerited favor, or grace, that He shows his children. This is in contrast to the specific grace Paul spoke of earlier in regard to his apostleship. Now he is speaking of the grace that is applied to all believers. And peace.... How precious little peace there is in this life. How few places we can find real harmony. Yet Grace and peace are granted to all of God's children. And He is glad to give it.

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Notice 1, that Paul is **thankful**, and 2, **who** he is thankful **to**, and 3, **what** he is thankful **for**.

Paul often expresses thanks for those things in life that are worthy of thanks. We don't see an attitude of ingratitude in Paul. He could have focused on lots of things that would be cause for a continual gripe toward God. It's not like Paul's life was a cake walk. But Paul often finds things that he can thank God for and often expresses that thanks. If you were to study all the imperatives in scripture, you would find the command to give thanks is in the top 10 most frequent commands. While much of what is called positive thinking is just hokey idealism, giving thanks is a mark of true spirituality. We would do well to emulate Paul.

Notice that Paul is thankful to God through Christ. Paul understands Christ's position as Paul's great high priest. He knows that he gets to God through Christ. And he even mentions this in his giving of thanks.

He also knows that all perfect gifts are from above. He knows the difference between flesh and spirit and he knows the marks of the ministry that **God** is doing.

So Paul gives thanks for what God is doing in Rome. He isn't thankful that here is another source of income to Paul. He isn't thankful that here is another audience to sell his books and tapes to. That which he is thankful for grants nothing to his flesh. Paul is thankful **for what God is doing in Rome**. He has put faith into the Romans. Faith is a gift of God. So if the Romans have faith, it wasn't their doing. It was God's doing.

This too is what we should be giving thanks for. When we see growth in a brother or sister, do we feel envy or do we give thanks? Do we give thanks when we see God at work in any way to grow his saints? Paul had that on his radar.

So when Paul heard about the faith of those in Rome in his various travels, he was glad. He didn't care who's ministry it was that initiated it. He was not in any competition with other ministers. He was just grateful that the Romans were being faithful and that God had people in this sinful political capital of the world.

⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,

The Romans didn't know Paul. They couldn't verify Paul's motives. But they did have the same God. So Paul lets them know

that this same God is Paul's witness. God can testify to the truth of Paul's statements.

Whom I serve- Paul describes himself as a servant. So what does he do? He serves. That's what servants do.

And how does Paul serve? With his spirit. There are only two uses of this phrase, here and in I Corinthians 5:4 where Paul says when you are gathered together, along with my spirit. This passage is used in the context of spiritual discipline. I think Paul is saying there that when the two or three are gathered in Christ's Name to do the business of reconciliation, count me in. Because I am completely behind the process that you are going through. I am spiritually involved even though I am not physically present.

Here are some other uses of the word spirit or pneuma, used in similar ways:

Romans 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

II Cor 2:13 I had no rest **in my spirit**, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

I Cor 6: 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body **and in your spirit**, which are God's.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, **fervent in spirit**, serving the Lord;

I Cor 2:10,11 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

Prov 20:27 The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord,
Searching all the inner depths of his heart.

Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 9:1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.

Scripture often talks of our spirit's being the thing that inhabits our bodies. While we cannot separate them while we are living, one way

of seeing ourselves is body and spirit. A whole lot of things can be happening in our spirit with few of them being visible in our bodies. I think that this is what Paul is referring to. He is saying that God is witnessing that which no one else would be able to know. He knows that in my service to God in the Gospel that I have been continually praying for you, even though those around me may have no idea what I am doing. God is the most faithful witness because He alone knows what goes on in a person's spirit.

Paul could be saying that his ministry is a pure ministry from his spirit, not originating in his flesh. I don't think that is what is intended, but it could be.

Nevertheless, Paul is saying in the course of this service I keep praying for you Romans. I don't go far before I come back to mentioning you in my conversations with God.

Oh that we would look at the church like Paul did. Here are people that, for the most part he had never met. And yet he included them regularly in his prayers. Think about what that means. Paul was very particular in what he filled his mind with, what he was concerned with. He didn't waste his time on peripherals. His concern was for the church, the only thing that God is concerned about. And he was concerned about them everywhere that they were found. Oh that we would be so selective with our attention and concern.

¹⁰making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.

While Paul is praying for the Romans, one of the major components of his prayer is that God would allow Paul to come see them. Paul is driven to be with them. And this situation is a little different than most that we see Paul in. These are not people that he has won to Christ. They are, for the most part, not person friends or even acquaintances. Yet we see here a longing to be with them.

Notice also how he phrases it- find a way in the will of God to come to you. While Paul desperately wants to visit them, he won't take it upon himself to do anything but that which is obedient to the will of God. He trusts God's will. He has no preconceived notion that he knows better than God, or that he wills for something that is better or wiser than that which God wills. So while he, for very spiritual reasons, wants to be of help. He will not force the issue. He will be patient and submitted to the will of God. What an example for us to follow. Even when we have good motives to do good things, we must still remain submitted to the will and timing of God.

¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Paul expresses here what he intends to do. This is the “why” of Paul’s desire to visit the people in Rome. Notice what he doesn’t say. “I want to come sight seeing in Rome because I have heard it is an amazing place. I want to see the Coliseum and all the other wonders of the known world.” He doesn’t say he wants to take a vacation and he thought Rome would be a great place to do it.

He doesn’t say he wants to come because he just loves people and loves getting to know them because people are so wonderful. No.

I initially focused on Paul’s desire to give, and that this was his primary reason for coming to Rome. But Mike pointed out that the context really doesn’t support that. Verses 11 and 12 need to be taken together. Look at the phrase that begins verse 12. “That is” or that is to say this. Then in verse 12 he in a sense restates verse 11 in a different way.

The emphasis of these two sentences is that **Paul is looking forward to, even longing for, a mutually edifying time with the Christians in Rome.** That is an amazing thing. Paul doesn’t know these people. Yet, Paul fully expects the Spirit to do what the Spirit does when Christians who are full of the Spirit get together. The emphasis is on mutual faith. This is a faith that is held in common. It is the same faith everywhere on the globe. Paul assumes that if a person has the Christian faith, they have the same Spirit. He knows there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The normal Christian experience is that God gives gifts to all believers that are designated for other believers. And when they spend time together, they deliver those gifts. And by that process everyone is built up and edified. Paul is eagerly looking forward to this process. While he intends to impart a gift, he looks forward as well to that which he will receive. Paul does not see himself as professor Paul to a room full of students. He sees himself as brother Paul in a family of believers.

We at Ferndale are that family as well. We may not minister as well or as often as we could. We may be distracted in ways that are hurtful. But I think it is safe to say that we have all experienced the type of give and receive that Paul is speaking of. We have all had someone bring a gift to us of the very thing we needed at the

moment. We have all carried that gift to someone else and heard their thankful response.

I guess the application to me is to get the things out of my life that hinder that process. To me the application is always to look for a way to give, maybe because I am by nature such a selfish person. I am convinced that if we consider all we have been given in Christ, there is always more that we can do in service to Him.

Notice too that Paul's desire for the Roman believers is that they would be established.

Sterizo (Stay rid' zo)

Thayer Definition:

- 1) to make stable, place firmly, set fast, fix
- 2) to strengthen, make firm
- 3) to render constant, confirm, one's mind

Paul's desire is that these Christians become solid and mature. He wants them strong enough and mature enough to handle the things they will be up against in this life. And everything he does on his part is to help them become this way. This should be our goal for everyone here. There is no sense wasting time evaluating everyone's efforts in that regard. How we do it may be ugly, but if we will all shoot for that end with each other, the Lord will use our efforts in service to Him.

Spiritual gift- The word for gift here is Charisma- an extension of the word Charis that we looked at last week. Charis was the word for grace or gift. Here we see Paul wanting to give a spiritual, as opposed to fleshly, gift. This is not saying that Paul would somehow bestow on someone those gifts, so that person would begin to prophecy or speak in tongues. The common usage of the word could easily mean that he wants to give them something spiritual, much as any true preacher or teacher or counselor would want to do. He wants to give them something spiritual to help them spiritually. That is the main point. So Paul may teach or preach or prophesy in order to edify them. And those who are with Paul will impart a spiritual gift that God has given them for Paul. That is how the Church operates.

¹³Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

It is important to Paul that the people in Rome understand his position. They could have easily said, well if you wanted to come so bad, why didn't you? People do what they want to do, so why aren't you here. Paul lays out that he has actually laid out plans to do what he says he wants to do. He's not like some who say they want something but never do anything consistent with the thing they say they want. Paul wants it and sets out to get it. But he has faced obstacles that can't or shouldn't be overcome.

We can learn something about faithful living here. Paul did not say that I planned to come to you, but planning was a sinful thing to do. Or he didn't say that he planned but he was wrong to plan at all because God had other plans. He says he planned but his plan was not the final say. God had other things in mind so Paul's plans changed to fit God's will. I think this should be a comfort to us. It is ok to plan. In fact, we should make plans. Anyone who accomplishes anything plans to accomplish something. But we should always include the "if the Lord wills" clause. We do not have any backing from scripture that says the Holy Spirit will cause us to make perfect plans. In fact, there will be times when we look back and wonder why we made any plans at all given how different our lives turned out than what we planned. But we are free to faithfully plan and faithfully live and always be open to the Lord re-directing our path.

And again, why did Paul want to visit? For fruit. Paul wanted growth. The mutual edification that Paul is looking forward to is fruit. Paul wanted spiritual growth in believers, he wanted new people coming to Christ. He wanted fruit for the Lord. And the Lord wants fruit, also, so Paul is being consistent with everything he has said earlier. There is no selfish motive here. We should all desire fruit in the church. And we should all busy ourselves in the process of ministering to each other in an effort to have fruit produced.

And he mentions, just like I have had with other gentiles. Everywhere he has gone Paul's ministry has born fruit. Some places it bore more than others. But he has always born fruit. That makes a lot of sense. Because everywhere he goes he preaches the Gospel.

¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.

Greeks and barbarians and wise and unwise are probably parallel phrases. They are both referring to the same thing. Greeks were seen as a culture that valued earthly wisdom and learning. They produced the greatest philosophers. They certainly regarded

themselves as the experts on wisdom. The barbarians on the other hand, were not considered all that wise, especially by the Greeks. The word for barbarian is a word made up based on sounds. To the Greeks all other languages sounded like bar bar bar bar hence barbarians.

But Paul, far from being superior or inferior to either Greeks or barbarians is a debtor. What does he owe? And to whom does he owe it. The normal use of the word debt implies something paid or given to us that we must return. My initial thoughts were that he owed the Gospel to the people he described. But the problem with that is that really he is a debtor to God in that regard, not Greeks and Barbarians. What debt could he have toward Greeks and barbarians? My initial thoughts were also that Paul was referring to his Roman audience because I thought they were made up of Greeks and barbarians. But Mike pointed out that Rome was not primarily made up of Greeks or barbarians. So what could this mean?

At this point context may be very helpful. Here is one possibility of what Paul is saying. "I am looking forward to coming to you for mutual edification. I want to impart a gift and receive the spiritual gifts God has for me from you. Every church I have been in it has been like this. This process has even indebted me to Greeks and Barbarians. I have been the recipient of so much good from the hands of these people that I am now indebted to them. It doesn't matter whether the world considers them wise or foolish, God does the same thing everywhere the gospel is preached. That is the kind of power the Gospel has.

A second alternative is to weaken the strict definition of debt. The word here is *opheiletēs* (of-i-let'-ace) Thayer's definition is

1) one who owes another, a debtor

1a) one held by some obligation, bound by some duty

If we focus on the obligation definition, Paul would have owed the Gospel to the Greeks and barbarians, not because the Greeks and barbarians gave him anything, but because they were in dire need and he had that which would rescue the person. This would be like a paramedic walking past an accident. They are obligated to help simply because they are qualified to help. The need creates the obligation.

Check it out for yourself this week. See what you think.

¹⁵So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

So as much as in me- As far as I am concerned, if I have any say in the matter, I am fully willing to do this thing. I want to come and

preach. That is how I will have fruit. That is how I will impart a spiritual gift. That is what I want to impart. And that is what I was separated to do. It is kind of funny that Paul wants to come and preach the gospel to them. And in the next 16 chapters he is going to write them the fullest account in the biblical record of what that Gospel consisted of. It looks like Paul just could not wait any longer. He had to get the gospel to them. And if he couldn't do it in person, he would do it in writing.

What in our lives do we approach with such tenacity, such passion? And what will it accomplish, compared to the ministry of the Gospel?

Notice too that the people he will be preaching to are already believers. His primary ministry will be to these **believers**. The gift that he will impart will probably be mostly focused on the presentation of the Gospel. We can see by this that the gospel is not something we just use for evangelism and then move on. I read somewhere that this is another difference between Christianity and all other religions. I read that all other religions start at a truth and then move on to secret truths that the beginners would have been unaware of. For a Christian, we are given the whole package at the beginning. Christian growth is the process of deepening our understanding of the significance of the gospel that was preached to us at the beginning. There are no **secrets** that we progress to. We simply grow in appreciation for what **Christ has done for us**, what we have **already** been given. We are inspired and encouraged and sometimes even rebuked into greater obedience based on the saving grace of God.

The Gospel is always appropriate. We never outgrow it. Romans, after all, is a presentation of the gospel. And we will find that it will have the same power in our lives as it did to the first Roman readers, if we will submit to its message and apply it to our lives.