



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 8 Issue 43

November 1, 2009

The Servant of the Gospel, Part 4

Romans 1:8-15, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For 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; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."

Unfair Passages

There are passages in Scripture which seem unfair and rather harsh. One such passage deals with Saul being disqualified as King of Israel. Under Saul's leadership, Israel was quite successful.

- The Ammonites were conquered, 1 Samuel 11.

- The Philistines were defeated, 1 Samuel 13-14.
- The Moabites, Edomites, Zohabites, and Amalekites were all put to flight, 1 Samuel 14:47-48.

In fact listen to 1 Samuel's description of the victorious king.

1 Samuel 15:7-8, "So Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword."

It is at this point, after all of Saul's success that we read this:

1 Samuel 15:10-11: "Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, 'I regret that I have made Saul king...'"

Now in a day in which the end of something often-times is valued more highly than the means, this account seems shocking! In fact many liberal commentators believe that Saul is one of the most tragic figures in the Old Testament. He was the victim of...

- A self-centered, egotistical Samuel, and...
- A capricious and petty god.

Yet, notice the reason for Saul's disqualification...

1 Samuel 15:11, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands."

While Saul did a lot of good things as king, he failed throughout his reign to do that which was "the Best," specifically the Labor to which God had called him. As such Saul was disqualified. Now as Servants of the Gospel it is important that we not get side-tracked (like Saul) into doing a lot of good and wonderful things to the neglect of what is best! It is therefore important that you and I NOT ONLY understand, BUT that we prove faithful to The Labor to which God has called us as Servants of the Gospel.

What is this Labor? Our passage introduces us to it in Romans 1:11.

Romans 1:11, "for I long to see you in order that."

With deep and strong desire, Paul "longed to see" the Romans- he "lusted" for them (that's the word in the original). Now he did so "in order that"! This is a purpose clause. By it we (1) see the reason for Paul's deep longing, as well as (2) get a glimpse at what Paul considered his task to be had he been at Rome. Thus, this text reveals to us what in Paul's mind constituted his LABOR as a Servant of the Gospel. And as Paul is an example/pattern for all servants.

1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."

This passage constitutes a description of our Labor as well. Accordingly this morning, let's look at 3

elements which constitute the LABOR of the Servant of the Gospel.

The Servant's Labor: Building Up the Body

Romans 1:11, "in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you."

That is the first reason Paul wanted to go to Rome, "to impart some spiritual gift." And such is the labor of the servant of the gospel! Now the "gift" Paul wanted to impart was "spiritual" not only in the sense that it was in the spiritual realm, but also that it had as its source the Holy Spirit. In light of this, what is this "gift?" There is 1 of 3 possibilities here. The Bible uses this term, gift, in reference to...

- The free gift of salvation (Romans 5:15-16; 6:23). YET Paul is here writing to believers, ones who had already received this gift. So this is out.
- The gifts of the Spirit spoken about in Romans 12:6ff. YET these gifts are bestowed directly by the Spirit Himself, not through a human instrument. So this is out. The ministry of edification brought about through the agency of preaching, teaching, exhorting, comforting, praying, guiding, and discipling (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:10-11; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Peter 4:10). This clearly is what Paul is referring to here.

Thus, Paul wanted to be with the Romans that he might be an agent through which God established and/or built them up. Notice...

Romans 1:11, "that you may be established."

This could be rendered, "unto your establishment." This carries the idea of putting in a buttress or a support, and so means to strengthen and/or build someone up. For example, it is used where Christ said to Peter:

=Luke 22:32, "...and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Peter's entire ministry could be summarized in this phrase: the strengthening of the brethren! During trials, Peter tells us that,

1 Peter 5:10, "...the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

God's will for us in the midst of the trial is not to remove us from the pain and difficulty, but to strengthen us such that we are able to stand in the midst of it! That's the idea behind this word. Being "established" speaks of being built up such that we are able to stand in the midst of severe difficulty; it speaks of being strengthened such that we do not shrink back in our faith, but rather boldly serve the Lord in and through all things.

From this we glean the first reason Paul gives for his wanting to go to Rome. Paul longed to see God's people "grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). In fact notice...

- This was the very purpose of the Apostolic ministry is "the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12).

- This was the reason Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica: “And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:2).
- This was the summary of Paul’s ministry as a Servant of Christ “And we proclaim [Christ], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor...” (Colossians 1:28-29).

So we see that Paul was burdened with the longing for God’s people to be BUILT UP unto Christ! It was for this that he LABORED! And lest you think that this was just Paul, the Bible overwhelmingly shows that this is the Labor and so the ministry of all servants of the gospel, the building up of the body of Christ! The calling is rooted and grounded in the nature of salvation and the creation of the Covenant Community:

- From the very beginning God deigned to save not individual persons, but a people unto Himself (Genesis 12, 15, 17).
- Now that people, the people saved by grace in Christ, would constitute His body, His bride, His people, or as Paul called it “the household of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15).
- As such just as God in Christ has cared for us, so we are called to care for one another...

Deuteronomy 10:17-19, “For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

Truly, God’s love and compassion does far more than save us. It serves as the standard/rule by which we are to live as a people of God.

1 John 5:20-21, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”

1 John 3:16, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

Guardians

When it comes to finding a guardian for our children, we do not look for someone who will love/care for our children with the same intensity as our love/care. I doubt we could find someone who would love our children as much as do we. Rather, when we look for a guardian, we look for one who will love/care for our children who share the same goals, values, approach with regard to our care/love. Well, so it is with God!

The sole purpose of leadership in the body of Christ is caring for and so building up the body...

Ezekiel 34:2, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding

themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?”“

Ephesians' 4:11-12, "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."

Any spiritual gift entrusted to the believer is the building up of the body.

1 Corinthians 12:7, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Any and all authority in the body of Christ is given unto the building up of the body.

2 Corinthians 10:8, "For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up..."

Ministry in the Kingdom of God is the building up of the body. God's people, serving according to their God-given calling

Ephesians 4:16, "...causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

Accordingly, the first step down the road of apostasy for any people is the failure to care for each other. If pure and undefiled religion is "...visit[ing] orphans and widows in their distress..."(James 1:27) then to neglect the least in the body truly is to be "worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). From all of this I hope you see that that which constitutes the LABOR of any and every servant of the gospel is the BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST. Accordingly Paul commanded the brethren,

Romans 14:19:, "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

Whatever position of authority you are in, use it to build people up: husbands, parents, older siblings, friends, ss. teachers, etc. If you who have been charged with such a responsibility do not serve this purpose, then

- What good are we as a servant?
- We are no different than Saul- who did a lot of good things, but neglected the best!

Truly, the faithful servant labors for the building up of the body of Christ! Yet it doesn't stop here. Notice the second calling of a servant of the gospel is his own personal holiness.

The Servant's Personal Holiness

Romans 1:12, "that is [to exclude any thought that he was boasting in v. 11- *"I've arrived, and now I want you to arrive"*- Paul describes another aspect of his desire...], that I may be encouraged together with you."

The word for "encouraged" means to be comforted or encouraged. It refers to the inner strengthening

of the mind and spirit, and so references the growth of an individual in Christ, His grace, their walks, their holiness. Now notice that this wasn't something Paul only longed for when it came to the Romans. It was his own personal desire as well. We see this passion elsewhere.

Philippians 3:8-11: Paul had "suffered the loss of all things, and count[ed] them but rubbish" for the purpose of...

- Gaining Christ, v. 8b.
- Knowing Christ, v. 10.
- Attaining to the resurrection from the dead, v. 11.

this truly was the passion and longing of Paul! You could say that this was his heartbeat! As such, he wrote...

2 Corinthians 4:11, "For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

From this we catch a glimpse at the agenda of Paul for his life.

- It wasn't an easy go: wealth, pleasure, happiness, and the like.
- Rather, it was being conformed to the image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:16, "Therefore we do not lose heart [though the world was crashing in all around him, Paul was not discouraged. Why?], but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."

Truly, the longing and goal of Paul's life was holiness. That was his agenda as a Servant of the Gospel. And yet, he wasn't a lone ranger. Would you notice that his longing was intermingled with his ministry of the Romans?

Romans 1:12, "that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."

Here Paul piles phrase on top of phrase to emphasize HIS desire to be transformed through the ministry of the Romans, a benefit which would be received through each others' faith. From this we see a second element to our labor as servants of the gospel; we must labor with regard to our own personal holiness! We must strive together in our walks with Christ!

- Is holiness your agenda when it comes to the ministry?
- Is purity in life one of your chief goals?

It must be! For don't miss it: our holiness ranks quite high on God's list of priorities. Christ died on the cross for this purpose:

Titus 2:14, "...that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Speaking of God's will when it comes to our lives, Micah wrote this:

Micah 6:8, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Again James wrote:

James 1:27b, "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father... to keep oneself unstained by the world."

Once again, if we have been called to serve in God's kingdom according to the pattern of God, what is God's pattern? The way of holiness! What therefore will God's agenda be for His servants? Holiness! Robert Murray M'Cheyne put it this way:

"How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, His instrument- I trust, a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."¹

Salvation of Lost Souls

Truly, Holiness must be one of our greatest passions. And yet, there is one more element, the salvation of lost souls.

Romans 1:13, "and I do not want you to be unaware, brethren."

Paul uses this expression when he is introducing his readers to something of great importance (Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). And thus, we could translate the sense of this as, "I want you to take special note of the fact that..."

Romans 1:13, "often I have planned to come to you."

The idea behind this phrase is that on more than one occasion plans for traveling to Rome were conceived and yet the apostle had been...

Romans 1:13, "and have been prevented thus far."

This is emphatic. While this does not say what prevented him, this does indicate that Paul had tried hard to make the trip to Rome, but circumstances beyond his control had prevented it. Now why the trip? Why did Paul want so desperately to get to Rome?

Romans 1:13, "in order that [again, this indicates the purpose for why Paul wanted to be in Rome] I might obtain some fruit among you also."

¹ Quoted in *Lectures to My Students* by Spurgeon, page 8

Paul's ministry was an unending quest for the gathering of spiritual "fruit." There is no question about that. Yet what specifically was the "fruit" Paul sought? Why did Paul want to go to Rome? Again, there are three possibilities here. In the Bible, Paul uses the term "fruit"

- In reference to the virtues that must characterize Spirit-led Believers, Galatians 5:22-23- love, joy, peace, patience, and the like...
- To refer to growth in holy living, Romans 6:22; Ephesians 1:17; 4:13; Colossians 1:9, 10; Philippians 1:22; 4:16-17; Hebrews 13:15.
- To refer to the conversion of a sinner to Christ...

Romans 16:5, "Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert [lit., "first fruit"] to Christ from Asia."

In our passage Paul obviously is referencing the third type of fruit: Converts to Christ. For not only are the first and second uses of the term addressed in vv. 11-12, but notice Paul's qualification...

Romans 1:13, "even as among the rest of the Gentiles."

Let me ask you: What was the primary fruit Paul obtained in his ministry among the Gentiles? CONVERTS! While Paul labored for more than just converts, nevertheless his ministry began here.

1 Corinthians 9:22: "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some."

1 Corinthians 3:6, 10: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth... According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it..."

Romans 15:20-21, "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation; but as it is written, 'They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.'"

Accordingly we conclude that another reason Paul longed to go to Rome was so that he might gather the fruit of saved souls. And this therefore stands as the agenda item for Servants of the Gospel: The Salvation of Lost Souls. And this must be the LABOR of ALL Servants of the Gospel...

John 15:16: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit..."

The purpose of all ministry is the bearing of fruit in Christ's name! Now, one of the "fruits" that Christ expects is that we

Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."

While the idea of "making disciples" involves far more than evangelism, nevertheless it begins here! Thus Paul commanded Timothy,

2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

This is the model for all Christian ministry.

- We Labor for the salvation of lost souls.
- And when we reap the fruit of salvation, we teach/disciple the baby Christian to labor for the salvation of lost souls.
- And so the third and final activity that Paul identifies here as the Labor of all Servants of the Gospel is the Salvation of Lost Souls!

Now unfortunately, as much as we would desire otherwise, we so often get side-tracked here, don't we? We fall into the "Tyranny of the Urgent!" While we'd love to invest in the Salvation of Lost Souls we get wrapped up with...

- The reports that are due next week.
- The home repairs that have been piling up since Johnny started soccer.
- The laundry, the dirty floors, next week's dinner party, etc...

In view of the...

- The OVERTIME the boss wants us to work.
- The GUESTS.
- The BUSY CALENDAR.
- The fact that we barely have enough TIME FOR THE FAMILY much less ourselves!

We put kingdom service off to when things "calm down." Yet, if a rich friend offered to fly you to the Bahamas for a weekend of fishing, boating, and scuba diving, I doubt there is not one here who couldn't find the time. Why is it then, when it comes to serving in the kingdom of God; which is far more important for today and eternity than a trip to the Bahamas we can't seem to find time?

From this I hope you see that faithfulness when it comes to the ministry of the Gospel involves willingness, intentionality, and submission. Submission, for this is God's heartbeat...

Luke 19:10: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

And so it must be ours!

Willingness, for cultural engagement is not easy. Accordingly, we must pray that God would give us boldness and a passion here. Intentionality...

- If indeed you were going on a trip to the Bahamas soon, I know that you would spend the coming weeks preparing.
- So it must be when it comes to the Kingdom. May God give us the grace to be intentional.

We've heard a strong message! Without grace, it will be condemning. Accordingly, let me encourage you to take whatever burdens you have this day to the cross. Yet be careful! Indeed! Let us lay our burdens down at the foot of the cross. But let us guard our hearts lest we hide behind the cross when it comes to the Labor of the Kingdom.

I've seen it many times. Brothers or sisters using their depravity as an excuse for inactivity. Yes, by ourselves we are unable to serve the Lord. But as cleansed individuals, we are driven by grace. Accordingly, as ones gazing at the cross what we've both seen and heard this day ought to be our daily passion and activity. Accordingly, allow the grace of God to inspire you unto fidelity in your service in the Kingdom!

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. This sermon can be found at [Build up the Body](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 1, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.