

The Greatest Letter Ever Written

An Expository Journey Through the Epistle of Romans

Romans 1:8-15

4-Genuine Spiritual Leadership

October 30, 2022

Romans 1:8-15

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,

10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;

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.

13 I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

There are many Reasons why people try to serve the Lord. And by the phrase, “*serve the Lord*”- I mean this:

The ongoing Struggle against the Lusts of the Flesh (by the Power of the Holy Spirit) by humbly and joyfully submitting to the Authority of Scripture (in our daily Life)- all to the Glory of God.

Some “serve the Lord” out of Fear. They have read about Hell; and they sure don’t want to go there. So, out of this Fear- they strive to “*tow the Line*”. And, by looking at them from a distance- you would think they are actually serving God. But they really aren’t. The Fear that motivates them- is *entirely* ungodly. It is not only a “wrong” Motive- it is a *sinful* Motive. It describes a god, (who doesn’t exist); who demands perfect Obedience or else- and then *equates* that false god with the one, true, and living God, Who is revealed in both Nature and Scripture. It is a form of *misrepresenting* God- which is Blasphemy.

But the ONLY Motivation for these people is to try to be “good enough”: to stay out of Hell. But those motivated, in their Service of God, by the Fear of Damnation will, sooner or later, become exhausted; and the End for them is that they are Angry, Bitter, Disillusioned, and Jaded. And the net Result for these people- is they will stop trying to serve the Lord for *any* reason.

Others try to serve God- out of some sense of Duty or Obligation. They have read and come to believe that Jesus is Worthy of all that we can do for Him- and so, they see their Obedience as being “*all we can do for Him*”. So, these people struggle to obey- because, they say, they are “*supposed to*”. But this is actually nothing more than a very carefully designed way to glorify *themselves*. Because when asked what the Motivation for their Obedience is- they will have to admit that it is their own moral sense of what is “Right”. And that is fueled by nothing but their own humanly engineered Discipline and will-Power. These people *think* they are being completely Selfless in their Efforts- when, in reality, they are the MOST Self-absorbed people on the Planet.

The ONLY kind of Obedience that pleases God- is an Obedience; a Service to the Lord; and a Following of Jesus- that is bathed in both godly Humility and Joy. And that “mind-set” reveals the Truth about the Glory of God better than any other.

But specifically, what I mean about “serving the Lord”, in the Context of what Paul wrote in verses 8-15, is a person, who has received the Divine Call to full-time Ministry of the Word. So, a Pastor or an Elder- a Deacon; and even the one who keeps the Church Books. And so, there are many reasons why a person might find himself in the Place of a “Church Leader”.

He may be genuinely called by God. He may have a specific theological or moral Issue, that he has bought into, that he wants everybody else to know. He may want to preach for ten minutes and see 3,000 people saved. He may wish to dominate weak- minded individuals and rule over them. He may want to become wealthy off the backs of people he can fleece. Or he may want others to see how spiritual or godly he is. Diotrephes was like that:

3John 9&10

9 I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.

10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.

And there are probably other reasons as well. But only the first one is the right one. He MUST be genuinely called by God to be in the Ministry. Because if he isn't- he will not last. The Demands of the Ministry are such- that it will eat him alive- unless God is with him. And the Proof of that- is the literal sea of men, who live in every city, who have become so “burned out” by being in the Ministry- that their Marriages are destroyed; their children are scattered; their “home-life” is non-existent; and they are some of the most miserable men on the Planet.

My own Father cautioned me to NOT go into the Ministry. He told me that I was not emotionally equipped to stand in that Place. He told me, “*Blair, you are too tender-hearted; too soft; too idealistic; too naïve; too heart-driven to last in an Occupation where you will be constantly criticized and seldom praised. Don't do it.*” And what my Father thought had great effect on me. And I had no Answer to his analysis except one:

Jeremiah 20:9b

... Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it.

God called me to preach the very night I was saved (June 25, 1971). And it was as real; and as evident; and as powerful as anything I have ever known in my Life. And I simply could

not ignore it. But as a 16-year-old boy- I was very ill-equipped for Life- much less the Ministry. So, I needed two very important things:

1. Education
2. Experience

... and I received both in the “School of Hard-Knocks” over the next few decades.

Because I had no idea that there were actual frauds in the Ministry. I should have-but I didn't. I never dreamed that some would “serve the Lord” merely for appearance's sake; in order to be considered “righteous” by fellow church members and by the world. And, over the years, I was introduced to some who “served” because of peer pressure to conform to certain human standards of religious and moral Behavior. I met Children, who had been *forced* into religious Activities by their sincere and well-meaning Parents, some of whom continued those Activities into adult Life- only because of parental Intimidation or perhaps from mere Habit. And I met those who were very zealous in their Christian Work because of the financial gain they thought it would produce for themselves.

But all of those motives for Service are merely external, and no matter how Orthodox or helpful to other people that Service might be- unless it is done out of a sincere Desire to please and glorify God- it is NOT “spiritual”; it is NOT godly; and it does NOT please God.

Sadly, it is also possible for a person to begin Christian Service out of genuine Devotion to God and then, later-on, fall into an Occasion or even a Habit of performing it *mechanically*, merely from a sense of “Duty”. This is what happens when human beings carelessly leave their “First Love” and fall into a rut of superficial Activity that is performed “in the Lord's Name” but which is NOT done in His Power; or for His Glory.

The Revelation 2:2-5

2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

But even when the Lord is served from a right Motive and in His Power, there always lingers near a Temptation to Resentment and Self-pity when one's Work is not appreciated by fellow Christians and perhaps goes completely unnoticed. The Apostle Paul was doubtlessly assailed by many Temptations from satan to give up his Ministry when he was opposed; or to give up on a difficult, fleshly, self-centered, and worldly Church such as the one at Corinth. But Paul was greatly used of the Lord because, by God's Grace and Provision, he ALWAYS kept his Motives pure. Because his single Purpose was to please God, the Displeasure or Disregard of other people, even of those he was serving, could not deter his Work or lead him into Bitterness and Self-pity.

In his opening Words to the Believers at Rome, Paul tells of his sincere spiritual Motives in wanting to minister to them. With Warmth, Affection, and Sensitivity that permeate the entire

Letter, he assures them of his genuine Devotion to God; and his genuine Love for them. Although Paul had not personally founded or even visited the Church at Rome at the time he wrote this Letter- he carried the heartfelt Passion of Christ for their spiritual Welfare and an eager Desire to develop their spiritual and personal Brotherhood. The Letter to Rome reveals that Paul not only had the Zeal of a Prophet; the Mind of a Teacher; and the Determination of an Apostle- but he also had the Heart of a Shepherd.

Now when they first received Paul's Letter, the Believers in Rome probably wondered why this great Apostle, whom most of them did not know, would bother to write them such a long and profound Treatise. They also may have wondered why, if he cared so much for them, he had not yet paid them a visit. In verses 8-15 of chapter 1, Paul gives the Answers to both of those Questions:

1. He wrote them because he cared deeply about their spiritual Maturity
2. He had not yet visited them because he had thus far been prevented

.. and in these few verses- the Apostle lays bare his Heart concerning them.

Now the Key that unlocks the Intent in this Passage is the phrase

God, whom I serve in my spirit (v. 9a).

... which reveals Paul's Heart.

But this man had been raised and educated in 1st Century Judaism. He had himself been a Pharisee; and was well acquainted with the other Divisions within the Jewish religion:

- The Sadducees
- The Essenes
- The Zealots
- The Scribes
- The Priests
- The Elders
- The Sanhedrin Court

... and Paul knew that, with few Exceptions, those spiritual Leaders served God "in the Flesh"; and were motivated by "Self-interests". Their Worship of God and Service to Him and others was mechanical, routine, external, and superficial. So, in a word, they were "Hypocritical". But Paul was also well acquainted with the Gentile world as well and knew that pagan religious Worship and Service were also external, superficial, and completely motivated by Self-interests.

And that is why Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well,

John 4:21-24

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

... Worship that is true and acceptable to God does NOT involve a particular Location, Ritual, or any Man-made Activities or Forms.

During the years before his Salvation, Paul himself had worshiped and served God in an external, Self-interested Way

Philippians 3:3-14

3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

... but now that he belonged to Jesus and had Christ's own Spirit indwelling him, he worshiped and served Him in both Spirit and in Truth- with his whole being.

Paul was now motivated by a genuine, inner Desire to serve God for God's Sake rather than his own; in God's revealed Way rather than his own; and in God's Power rather than his own. He was no longer motivated by Self-interests; or by peer Pressure; and no longer focused on Jewish religious Tradition; or even on Self-effort to keep God's Law. He was not interested in trying to please others- not even himself- only God:

1Corinthians 4:1-5

1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.

4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

So, the Focus of his entire Life and Ministry was to glorify God by proclaiming the saving Grace of the Gospel. He lived in Conformity to the Divine Standard he proclaimed to the Ephesians, serving God,

not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. (Ephesians 6:6)

... and as he reminded the Elders from that Church,

The Acts 20:33&34

33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.

Paul did not serve because it was “Self-pleasing”, because he said,

Romans 15:3

For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME."

... nor did Paul serve in order to gain Glory and Honor from men.

1Corinthians 9:16

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

... and so, in a later Letter to the Church at Corinth he declared,

2Corinthians 4:5

For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

In verses 8-16a, Paul's Words suggest ten Marks of true spiritual Service that should typify ALL genuine gospel-Ministries:

1. A Thankful Spirit (v.8)
2. A Concerned Spirit (v.9-10a)
3. A Willing and Submissive Spirit (v.10b)
4. A Loving Spirit (v.11)
5. A Humble Spirit (v.12)
6. A Fruitful Spirit (v.13)

7. An Obedient Spirit (v.14)
8. An Eager Spirit (v.15)
9. A Bold Spirit (v.16a)

... so, let's look at each one.

1. A THANKFUL SPIRIT

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

The first Mark of true spiritual Service, which Paul had in abundance, is “*Thankfulness*” or a “*Thankful Spirit*”. The Apostle was genuinely Grateful for what God had done *for* and *through* him, but he was equally Grateful for what God had done in and through *other* Believers. He perhaps did not thank the Roman Believers themselves, lest it be considered as Flattery. He said, rather, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you.

Paul's Thankfulness was intimate, first of all, because of his own “spiritual Closeness” to God. “*I thank my God*”, he declared. Pagans simply didn't talk like that. And neither would most Jews have referred to God with a personal pronoun like, “my”. And that tells us that, for Paul, God was not some “*theological Abstraction*” but a beloved Savior and a close Friend- something most Jews would consider as being Blasphemy. And then, as he testifies in the following verse, he served God, “**in his spirit**”, or from the depth of his heart and mind.

And we notice that Paul gave Thanks- “through Jesus Christ”, the one eternal Mediator between God and Man.

John 14:6

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

1Timothy 2:5&6

5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

... and so, based on their Belief and Trust and Hope in Jesus Christ- genuine Believers have the Privilege of calling Almighty God, “*my God*”- even, “*my Father*”.

It is because we have been given Access to the Father through Jesus Christ that we always can ...

... draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16b)

... and this allows us, as Believers, to cry out,

"Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

Paul's Thankfulness was also intimate because of his own “spiritual Intimacy” with fellow Believers- even to those in Rome- most of whom he did not personally know.

I thank my God...for you all,

... that is, for *all* the Believers in the Church at Rome- he had never even met!

His Gratitude was impartial and all-encompassing, making no distinctions. So, in every Epistle but one, Paul expresses Gratitude for those to whom he writes. The lone exception was the Letter to the Churches in Galatia, which had defected from the true Gospel of Grace to a “Works- System of Righteousness” and was worshiping and serving in the Flesh because of the influence of the Judaizers.

But we need to know that his intimacy with other Churches was not because the other Churches were perfect- because Paul wrote most of his Letters to correct either wrong Doctrine or unholy Living or both. But even where the Need for Instruction and Correction was great, he found something in those Churches for which he could be Thankful.

This Apostle wrote the Letter to the Romans while he was in the city of Corinth, and during the time when the Jewish Leaders in that city were plotting to kill him.

The Acts 20:1-3

1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia.

2 When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.

3 And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, where he knew Imprisonment and possibly even Death awaited him. Yet he was still filled with Thanksgiving.

Some years later, as he was a Prisoner in his own house in Rome, while awaiting an Audience before Caesar, Paul was still thankful. While there and in that Condition, he wrote four Epistles (**Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon**), commonly called, the “*Prison Epistles*”. In each of those Letters he gives Thanks for the Believers to whom he writes

Ephesians 1:15-17

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,

16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

Philippians 1:3-5

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,

4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,

5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

Colossians 1:2-8

2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel
6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;
7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,
8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

Philemon 4-6

4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,
5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;
6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

During his 2nd Roman Imprisonment, he may have spent time in the infamous Mamertine Prison. If so, we can be sure he was thankful even there, although the city sewage system actually ran through the Prison. The Story is that when the cells were filled to capacity, the sewage gates were opened and all the Inmates would drown in the filthy water, making way for a new batch of Prisoners. But Paul's Thankfulness did not rise or fall based on his earthly Circumstances- but on the Richness of his Fellowship with his Lord.

The specific Reason for Paul's thankfulness for the Roman Christians was their deep Faith, which was being proclaimed throughout the whole world. And from secular History we learn that in A.D. 49 Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome, thinking they were all followers of someone named, “*Chrestus*” (an incorrect spelling of “Christ”). Apparently, the Testimony of Jewish Christians had so incited the nonbelieving Jews that the Turmoil threatened the Peace of the whole city. The Believers had, then, a powerful, Testimony not only in the city, but throughout the whole world. What a Commendation!

But by the term, “**Faith**”- Paul was *not* referring to the initial Trust in Christ that brings Salvation but to the *persevering* Trust that brings spiritual Strength and Growth. And Faith like that also may bring severe Persecution. Believers in Rome lived in the “lion's den”, as it were, yet they lived out their Christian Faith with Integrity and Credibility.

Some churches today are famous because of their Pastor; their Architecture; their stained-glass Windows; or their Size or Wealth. But the Church in Rome was famous because of its Faith. It was a Fellowship of genuinely redeemed Saints through whom the Lord Jesus Christ manifested His Life and Power, to such an extent- that their Character was known everywhere.

A thankful Heart for those to whom one ministers is essential to genuine, biblical “spiritual Service”. The Christian, who is trying to serve God's people, however needy they may be, without Gratitude in his heart for what the Lord has done for them and in them- will find his Service lacking Joy. And without serving with Joy- all we have left- is humanly engineered will-power. So, the main ingredient in ALL “spiritual Service” MUST be genuine Joy that flows out from genuine Love for the people and for what God has done in them and for them. Paul could usually find a Cause for Thanks so that he could honor the Lord for what had been done already; and great Hope for what God would use him to do.

Superficial Believers are seldom Satisfied- and therefore, they are seldom Thankful. Because they focus on their own Appetites for things of the world- and that causes them to be

more Resentful than Thankful. A thankless Heart is a Selfish, Self-centered, and Legalistic Heart. And a man like that- cannot help *anyone* spiritually. Paul had a thankful heart because he continually focused on what God was doing in his *own* Life; in the Lives of other faithful Believers; and in the Advancement of His Kingdom throughout the world. So, a Thankful Spirit is a Requirement for “spiritual Service”.