

The Greatest Letter Ever Written

An Expository Journey Through the Epistle of Romans

Romans 1:8-15

4-Genuine Spiritual Leadership

November 27, 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”.

2. A CONCERNED SPIRIT

Romans 1:9&10

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.

The second Mark of true spiritual Service is what this Apostle demonstrated throughout his entire saved Life- a Concerned Spirit.

So, even though he was very grateful for what had been and what was being done in the Lord's Work there in the Church at Rome- Paul was also deeply concerned about balancing those off with what yet needed to be done. And it is in this Section where we find the key Passage that has to do with all of verses 8-15:

God, whom I serve in my spirit.

Now the Greek word, *latreuō*, is always used throughout the New Testament to describe our religious “Service”. And this word is *sometimes* translated as, "**Worship.**" So, except for two References to the “service” of pagan idols, this term is used in Reference to the Worship and Service of the one, true, and living God. The greatest Worship any Believer can offer to God- is devoted, pure, and heart-felt Ministry.

Godly Service calls for total, unreserved Commitment. Paul served God with everything he had, beginning with his own spirit, that is, flowing out of a deep Desire in his soul. In chapter 12 of this same Letter, he appeals to all believers,

1... by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul used a similar Statement about true Worship in writing to the Church at Philippi:

Philippians 3:3

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,

When his shipmates had given up all Hope of surviving the fierce storm on the Mediterranean Sea as they sailed to Rome, the Apostle assured them,

The Acts 27:22-25

22 Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

23 For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me,

24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'

25 Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.

Paul could declare to Timothy,

2Timothy 1:3a

I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience ...

Because he served God from a sincere Heart, he also served with a clear Conscience. Paul's Worship and Service were absolutely related. His Worship was an Act of Service, and his Service was an Act of Worship.

Because his young friend had periodically stumbled spiritually, Paul admonished Timothy:

2Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

... and then a few verses later he also warned him:

2Timothy 2:22b

... flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Paul's *primary* Service to God was the preaching of the Gospel of His Son, the Ministry to which the Lord had called him; and to which he gave every breath of his Life. But as he goes on to explain, that Service to God included deep, personal Concern for everyone who believed the Gospel, whether they had heard it from him or from someone else. So, he was not concerned for the saints in Rome because they were "*his* Converts" (which they were not), but because he and they were Brothers and Sisters- who had the *same* spiritual Father through trusting in the *same* Divine Son as their Savior.

As he mentions several times in the opening of this Epistle (1:10-11,15), and reiterates near the Closing (15:14,22), he was writing to the Roman Church somewhat as an "outsider" and a "stranger"- humanly speaking. And that Fact makes his intense Concern for these Believers even more remarkable and touching.

Perhaps because most of them did not know him personally, Paul here calls the Lord as Witness to his sincere Love and Concern for his spiritual Brothers and Sisters at Rome. He knew that God, Who knows the real Motive and Sincerity of every heart (cf. **1Corinthians 4:5**), would testify as to how unceasingly he made mention of them always in his Prayers. So, Paul was not repeating himself by using both "unceasingly" and "always". He was simply giving them both a negative and positive

Expression of his great Concern.

So, even though he rejoiced in and gave thanks for their great Faithfulness, he knew that apart from God's continuing Provision even strong Faith falters. Those saints were therefore always in his Prayers. So, we see that the faithful Saint needs the Prayer Support of fellow Believers as much as the Saint who is Unfaithful.

Paul also assured the saints of Thessalonica that

2Thessalonians 1:11&12

11 ... we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power,

12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

... and in his earlier Letter the Apostle admonished these Believers to have a Devotion to unceasing Prayer, when he wrote,

1Thessalonians 5:17

pray without ceasing;

Paul also counseled the Ephesian believers to

Ephesians 6:18-20

18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

... and toward the end of his Romans Letter Paul pleads:

Romans 15:30b-32

30 ... I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

31 that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;

32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

So, even though Paul does not specifically state the particular Petitions he made on behalf of the Roman Christians, we can safely assume they were similar to those he mentions in his other Letters.

Ephesians 3:14-19

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,

**16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,
17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

That is praying in depth! Paul prayed that those saints would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit; that Christ would be at Home in their Hearts; that they would be filled with God's own Love; and that they would be made Perfect in His Truth and Likeness!

And Paul prayed that the Believers in Philippi would abound in Love...

Philippians 1:9b-11

**9 ... still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,
10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;
11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**

... and he assured the Colossian Church:

Colossians 1:9-12

**9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;
11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously
12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.**

So, the Content of all Paul's Prayers was spiritual. He prayed for individual Believers, but he also offered many Prayers for entire groups of Believers. He prayed that their hearts would be knit together with the Heart of God and to each other; that their Knowledge of His Word would be made complete; and that their Obedience to His Will would be made Perfect. So, from this we see that the Depth, Intensity, and Consistency of Prayer is what reveals the Depth, Intensity, and Consistency of Concern.

3. A WILLING AND SUBMISSIVE SPIRIT

Romans 1:10b

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

The Apostle Paul not only prayed for the spiritual well-being of the Roman Church- but was very eager to be used by God as an Instrument to help answer that Prayer- according to His Divine Will. The Christian Church has *always* been full of people who are quick to criticize- but contains very few- who are willing to be used by God to actually solve the Problems they say they are concerned about.

Many Christians are much more willing to give Money to an “Outreach Ministry” than they are to actually engage lost sinners themselves. A man once came up to me after a Worship Service and suggested that the Church provide a large sum of Money to create a sophisticated telephone answering Service that would give a Gospel Message to callers, when placed on hold. But when I asked that man why he was so concerned about that- he replied that he was worried that his neighbor wasn’t saved. So, I asked him, *"Why don't you just go over and tell him the gospel yourself?"*

It is much easier, and therefore more attractive to the Flesh, to pray for others to be used by the Lord than to pray that He use us. But like Isaiah, when Paul heard the Lord's Call for Service or saw a spiritual Need, he said,

Isaiah 6:8b
Here am I. Send me

There is, of course, an important Place for praying for others in the Lord's Service. But the true Measure of our Concern for His Work is our Willingness for Him to use US.

Paul had been making Request to God for a long time that he could visit the Church in Rome in order to minister to them and to be ministered to by them:

Romans 1:11&12

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.

... so, apparently, he hoped to make the Journey soon, saying,

Romans 1:10b

... if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

Paul's Eagerness to serve God was always directed by the Will of God. He did not serve in the direction of his own Desires and Insight but according to the Will of the One he served. When the Prophet Agabus dramatically predicted the Danger that awaited Paul in Jerusalem, the Apostle's friends begged him not to go.

The Acts 21:10-14

10 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

12 When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

14 And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

Now when first confronted with the biblical Truth about God's absolute Sovereignty- many begin to ask, *"If God is going to sovereignly Accomplish what He plans to do anyway, what is the Purpose of Praying?"* And there are several Answers to that- but Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895-1960) designed an Analogy to illustrate the Relationship of a believer's Prayers to God's Sovereignty:

“We will suppose the case of a man who loves violin music. He has the means to buy for himself a very fine violin, and he also purchases the very best radio obtainable. He builds up a library of the great musical scores, so that he is able to take any piece that is announced on the radio, put it on his music stand, and play along with the orchestra. The announcer says that Mr. Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra are going to play Beethoven's seventh symphony. The man in his home puts that symphony on his stand and tunes his violin with what he hears coming from the orchestra. The music that comes from the radio we might call, “Foreordained”. Ormandy is going to follow the score just as Beethoven wrote it. The man in his living room starts to scratch away at the first violin part. He misses beats, he loses his place and finds it again, he breaks a string, and stops to fix it. The music goes on and on. He finds his place again and plays on after his fashion to the end of the symphony. The announcer names the next work that is to be played and the fiddler puts that number on his rack. Day after week after month after year, he finds pleasure in scraping his fiddle along with the violins of the great orchestras. Their music is determined in advance. What he must do is to learn to play in their tempo, in their key, and to follow the score as it has been written in advance. If he decides that he wants to play Yankee Doodle when the orchestra is in the midst of a Brahms's number, there's going to be dissonance and discord in the man's house but not in the Academy of Music. After some years of this the man may be a rather creditable violin player and may have learned to submit himself utterly to the scores that are written and follow the program as played. Harmony and joy come from the submission and cooperation.”

So, it is with the Plan of God. It is rolling toward us, unfolding day by day, as He has planned it before the Foundation of the World. There are those who fight against it and who must ultimately be cast into outer Darkness because He will not have in His heaven those who proudly resist Him. This cannot be tolerated any more than the authorities would permit a man to bring his own violin into the Academy of Music and start to play Shostakovich when the program called for Bach. The score of God's plan is set forth in the Bible. In the measure that I learn it, submit myself to it, and seek to live in accordance with all that is therein set forth, I shall find myself in joy and in harmony with God and His plans. If I set myself to fight against it, or disagree with that which comes forth, there can be no peace in my heart and life. If in my heart I seek to play a tune that is not the melody the Lord has for me, there can be nothing but dissonance. Prayer is learning to play the tune that the eternal plan of God calls for and to do that which is in harmony with

the will of the Eternal Composer and the Author of all that is true harmony in life and living.¹

The popular Practice of demanding things from God and expecting Him to meet those Demands is both perverted and heretical. It is an Attempt to sway God's perfect and holy Will to our own imperfect and sinful Will. It is a sinful Practice. Paul sought the Advancement of God's Kingdom and Glory through God's Will- not his own.

Self-styled Messiahs are always Megalomaniacs. They have grandiose Schemes for winning the world for Christ. They always think big, and their plans seldom show Evidence of being limited by God's Plans, which, from a human Perspective, sometimes seem Small and Insignificant. Jesus' earthly Ministry did not focus on converting the great Leaders of His day or evangelizing the great cities. He chose twelve- very ordinary men to train as His Apostles, and most of His Teaching took place in insignificant, often isolated, parts of Palestine. He did not raise large sums of money; or attempt to use the Influence of important people to His Advantage. His sole Purpose was to do His Father's Will- in His Father's Way- and in His Father's Time. That is the highest Goal for us, as well.

4. A LOVING SPIRIT

Romans 1:11

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

Another Mark of genuine spiritual Service is a loving Spirit. Paul wanted to visit the Roman Believers in order to serve them lovingly- in God's Name. He did not want to go as a tourist to see the famous Appian Way; or the Forum; or the Coliseum; or visit the chariot races. He wanted to go to Rome to give of himself, not to entertain or indulge himself.

The Christian, who looks on his Service to the Lord as a means of receiving Appreciation and personal Satisfaction is inevitably subject to Disappointment and Self-pity. But the one who focuses on giving- never has such Problems. Paul's Ministry Goal was:

Colossians 1:28&29

28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

The Apostle's loving Spirit is reflected beautifully in his first Letter to Thessalonica:

1Thessalonians 2:5-12

5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed — God is witness—

6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

¹ *The Invisible War: The Panorama of the Continuing Conflict Between Good and Evil*; Donald Grey Barnhouse; 1980; pages 122-123

7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.

8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;

11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,

12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

The foremost Characteristic of genuine Love is selfless Giving, and it was out of such Love that Paul assured the Church in Corinth,

2Corinthians 12:15a

I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls...

A Willingness to “**spend**” here was a Willingness to use all his Resources and Energy in their Behalf, and a Willingness to be “spent” was a Willingness to die for them- if necessary.

Paul was burdened for the physical Welfare of the Roman believers, but his overriding concern was for their spiritual well-being, and therefore his principal purpose for longing to see them was that he might impart to them some spiritual Gift.

And the Gift Paul wanted to impart was “spiritual” not only in the sense of being in the spiritual Realm but in the sense that it had its Source in God the Holy Spirit. Because he was writing to Believers, Paul was not speaking about the free Gift of Salvation through Christ about which he speaks in **Romans 5:15-16**. Nor could he have been speaking about the Gifts he discusses in chapter 12, because those Gifts are bestowed directly by the Spirit Himself, not through a human Instrument. He must therefore have been using the term, “spiritual Gift” in its broadest sense, referring to any kind of divinely-Empowered spiritual Benefit he could bring to the Roman Christians by preaching, teaching, exhorting, comforting, praying, guiding, and disciplining.