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Romans 1:7-13 “Mutual Edification and Strengthening”

Intro. In v.11 Paul stated that one purpose for his planned visit to the church in Rome was to strengthen them. Yes, Christians need strengthening. When you yield to temptation, you may recall the words of Jesus to Peter, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt. 26:41). In a world full of temptation and spiritual lies, we need to be strong in the Lord more than ever. We need to be able to stand strong for the Lord and not stumble and fall from our faithful commitment to the Lord. We need to be strong in the face of the many trials of life.

How, then, can we be strengthened in our Christian walk? One thing that stands out in this text of Scripture is that we need each other if we are going to stand strong for the Lord. As Peter was warned of the temptation to deny Christ, he was confident in his *own* strength. Yet after he was as weak as water in the face of temptation, Jesus sought to restore him and said to him in Luke 22:32, “strengthen your brethren.” Our Scripture text today tells us how we can do that.

One reason Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans was to introduce himself to the congregation as he prepared for a visit to strengthen the congregation and preach the gospel. Most in the church had only heard of him, and some of it was not good. Before he was converted, Saul of Tarsus arrested Christians and voted for their execution for blasphemy. Any Judaizers among them would have questioned Paul’s openness to allow Gentile believers to bypass circumcision and the Jewish ceremonial law. No doubt he had critics in that church who would poison the Roman Christians against Paul (cf. 3:8). So in order to open their hearts to be receptive to his presentation of the gospel and sound doctrine, he did a wonderful job opening *his* heart of unselfish love for the Roman Christians. He wanted to establish rapport with the believers in Rome. He wanted to disarm their suspicions. He wanted to show the Romans how much he really cared for their spiritual growth. Only after such an introduction did he move on to present the great doctrines of the Christian faith that are found in this epistle.

This morning I want to share with you, based on this text of Scripture and Paul’s own example¹ how we can and should edify and strengthen one another in the faith. This is very much needed in the church today. First of all, we should:

I. PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

As Paul indicates here, it is ever a Christian privilege and duty to bear up our loved ones and fellow Christians to the throne of grace. If you are on Facebook, you have probably seen this illustration of that truth. As Peter was facing the temptation to deny Christ, Jesus said in Luke 22:32, “but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail....” As Paul references his prayer for the believers in Rome in the opening verses of this letter, I have been able to glean some principles about prayer that I would like to share with you. As you spend time in prayer, I encourage you to:

A. Pray Regularly - Paul says beginning in the last of v.9, “that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers....” Paul was a man of consistent prayer. There is no doubt that prayer was a major aspect of Paul’s Christian life.

¹ 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:7.

So we should give heed to the exhortation of the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “pray without ceasing.” We should give priority to prayer. Furthermore, we see implied in our text that we should:

B. Pray in Jesus’ Name - Notice he says in v.8, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ....” Christ is not only the mediator between God and man but also between man and God (1 Tim. 2:5; Jn. 14:6). He is the One who has created the access to God that enables us to approach Him in prayer. Paul says of Jesus in Romans 5:2, “through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand....” So to attempt to pray to God without coming through the Lord Jesus Christ is unacceptable to God the Father.

This is why we should either begin our prayer indicating that we are coming to God through Jesus, or we should conclude our prayer by saying, “in Jesus name” with an understanding of what that means, as reflected in our text.

Furthermore, as we pray, we should:

C. Pray with Thanksgiving – Just about every letter of the apostle Paul begins with thanksgiving to God.² He truly exemplified thankfulness. Paul said in v.8, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.” As Paul sought to open the hearts of the Roman believers to him, he began with a complement, and yet he knew that *God* should be thanked first and foremost for the great work of grace that *He* had accomplished in the church in Rome. No doubt Paul was thankful for the genuineness of their salvation and the clear testimony of their lives. He was thankful that they were a redeemed fellowship manifesting the life and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is so much to be thankful for. Do you have a thankful heart? Are you thankful for others? Do you thank God for everything that occurs in your life, no matter what the circumstances may be? After all, 1 Thess. 5:18 says, “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Giving thanks will take out any bitterness or resentment you may be feeling. So be sure to make thanksgiving an important aspect of your prayer life, including being thankful for others.

There is another principle about prayer reflected in our text. We should:

D. Pray According to God’s Will - Paul had learned this truth and set an example here in our text. As Paul prayed, he said in the last of v.10 that he was “asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.” He was following the example of the Lord Jesus who prayed in Gethsemane, “nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). In 1 John 5:14-15 the apostle John taught us to pray only according to God’s will. Then James, the half-brother of Jesus, said regarding making travel and business plans, “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that’” (James 4:15). The limiting factor in everyone’s decisions, and everyone’s prayer requests, should be if it is the will of God.

Paul was one of the greatest Christians of all time, and yet God did not simply say “yes” to his prayer request. Sometimes when we pray and ask of God, the answer is a “no,” or “not now,” or “I will grant your request in a different way.” In v.13 he explained how evidently it had not yet been God’s will to grant his request to visit the church in Rome. He said, “I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented)....” No doubt Paul’s missionary activities in Asia minor, Macedonia and Greece kept him too busy up to

² Galatians was one exception.

this point. God had not released him from those responsibilities (cf. 15:18-24; Acts 16:7). He had recently spent three years in the strategic city of Ephesus, longer than any other church he had established. He also had an important benevolent and outreach trip to the Jews of Jerusalem that was pending. Only after that was accomplished did he believe he could make a trip to Rome.

Again, Paul wanted to remove any doubts concerning his love for them. He apparently was aware that some Christians in Rome may have been critical of him for not taking time to visit such a leading church in the Christian community that was so strategically located. So he assured them that the delay in his visit was not due to his lack of love and concern for them, that only due to his obedience to the will of God.

We need to understand that God is sovereign over our lives and that reality should be reflected in our prayer requests. The true servant is totally submissive to God's will in our lives and in our prayers.

The fact is, we should pray in tune with the eternal plan of God. Let me illustrate that truth. I will use my smart phone to play an "F" note. [Sing "pray" with the "F" note. Then sing an F# and at the same time play the "F." Then sing in tune with the F.] Doesn't that sound so much better? It is so much better to pray *according* to God's will. That reminds me of what Jesus said in Mt. 18:19, "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." The word translated "agree" is *sumphoneo* in Greek, from which we get our word symphony. You are much more likely to pray in harmony with God's will when another believer is in harmony with your prayer request, especially if you arrive at that common understanding independently.

Actually, it turned out that Paul did not arrive in Rome as a traveling missionary but as a prisoner to be tried before Caesar. Paul's request that God may enable him to "succeed in coming to you" was not granted in the way requested. The Greek word translated "succeed" (*euodoo*) literally means "a good way," and typically means "to grant a prosperous and expeditious journey." Instead of a prosperous journey he endured a long and perilous journey that ended in shipwreck! Yet as he submitted his prayers to God's will, consider the outcome. He was able to share the gospel with many on the island where he was shipwrecked. After getting on a different ship to Rome, he was able to share the gospel with Caesar and his court. He was able to share the gospel with the praetorian guard and many came to Christ (Php. 4:22). He had time to write some of his prison epistles. If he had made it to Rome prior to the date of this letter, perhaps this letter would never have been written, and the world would have been much poorer for it. Can you see how God's will is as Paul stated in Romans 12:2, "good and acceptable and perfect." How can we pray for anything other than what is God's will! Remember that the next time you are about to make your request unto God.

Finally, another principle of prayer I find in our text is the fact that we should:

E. Broaden Our Intercession - Yes, another vital aspect of prayer is intercession, and no small portion of our prayer life should include intercession for others. We *need* for people to pray for us. Yet isn't it true that most of us pray primarily for those who are family, friends, and for our church family? When was the last time you prayed for the members of another church family? Well Paul indicated in vv.9-10 that he had been praying for the believers in Rome even though he personally knew only some of them, like Priscilla and Aquila (16:3-5). Paul's prayers went well beyond his immediate circle of personal acquaintances and apostolic responsibility. He also prayed for others in the church that he did not even know.

There is a good reason why Paul would include the church in Rome as part of his intercession to God. It was strategically located to influence the entire Roman Empire. It was the

capital city. It was said that “all roads lead to Rome.” Rome attracted travelers from all over the world. That also explains why the testimony of this church spread so broadly.

So I would ask my home church, Swift Creek Baptist Church, to pray for Harvest Christian Fellowship, a church that is strategically located in the vicinity of the capital of Virginia and the International Mission Board. Pray as this church is beginning their search for a pastor. I would ask you to pray for Swift Creek Baptist Church that is also seeking a pastor. Keep praying for the church in faraway Belarus. I wonder how many of us have someone praying for us that we do not even know? What a great example Paul has left for us.

Now in addition to prayer support, another way we can strengthen one another is to:

II. PERSONALLY MINISTER TO ONE ANOTHER

In vv.10-12 we see that Paul had been “asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.” So based on our Scripture text today, I want to share several ways you should minister edification to one another:

A. Set an Example for Others - What a great example the church in Rome was! Paul says in the last of v.8 that “your faith is proclaimed in all the world.”³ Paul had received news about the high and renowned quality of their faith in the Lord Jesus and of their faith in His Word. They were holding fast to the great revelation of truth that centers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. As implied in v.4 they were characterized by an obedient faith. His statement is similar to what he said about the Thessalonian church, “For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere...” (1 Thess. 1:8). The church in Rome must have taken a strong stand regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ, resisting the attacks of unbelieving Jews in Rome. The Roman historian Suetonius explained why the Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome, “since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [the Latin spelling for Christ]” (*Life of Claudius* 25.4). So this church was a fine example for others regarding their strong faith in the Lord.

While I was in Bible college and seminary, I learned a lot from my textbooks and the lectures of my professors. However, I also learned by observing the day-to-day lives of my professors and hearing their personal testimonies. [Illus.#C-3150].

So think about the example of the church in Rome. Now think about what your church is known for. Some churches are known for their music and worship ministries. Some are known for the oratorical skill of their pastor. Some are known as the “cool church” in town. But this church in Rome was known for its great faith. As I learned about the faith and biblical commitment of Harvest Christian Fellowship, I was then excited to learn that I would have the privilege to minister to this congregation. I want to commend you for your example and reputation as a church. A church that learns God’s Word, believes God’s word, and obeys God’s Word is a church that God will bless. After all, true faith is built upon the written Word of God.

Another principle I see here is that we should:

³ Though this may be viewed as hyperbole, it seems likely that the reputation of this church in Rome had penetrated all the provinces of the Roman Empire.

B. Minister in Person When Possible - This was the heartbeat of the apostle Paul expressed in our text of Scripture. He not only wanted to minister to them through a letter, but also personally minister to them by visiting the church in Rome. In v.10 Paul was praying that he would finally succeed in coming to them. He said in v.11 that “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.” Paul wasn’t coming to Rome because he wanted to tour the Appian way or see the Forum or watch chariot races at the Coliseum. He wanted to come because he wanted to give of himself in service to others. He wanted to see them face-to-face.

Growing up in the Presbyterian Church, I used to recite the apostles Creed. One line says, “I believe in the communion of the saints.” Yes, the fellowship or communion of believers is very important and to fellowship in person is clearly the best way to benefit from Christian fellowship. Yet the pandemic has all too often interrupted that in-person communion. Pray that the pandemic will end soon.

So we should give heed to Hebrews 10:25 which says, “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another....” Yes, minister to one another in person as much as possible.

Furthermore, we should:

C. Minister with Our Spiritual Gifts - Again, Paul said in v.11 that “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.” Likewise, the apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:10, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” We cannot know what special gift Paul had in mind, as indicated by the vague term “some” (*tis*). This is what we *do* know: It was specifically spiritual in nature, endowed as a gift of grace (χάρισμα... πνευματικός),⁴ and we know from other Scriptures that such gifts are endowed by God’s Holy Spirit. One of Paul’s primary spiritual gifts was teaching God’s Word. He was always a disciple maker. The book of Romans is an example of his great teaching presented in a clear, convincing and systematic way. So when he came to Rome, he planned to administer the gifts of teaching, exhortation, and so forth. What better gift could he minister than the teaching and preaching of God’s Word!

Most of you do not have the gift of teaching but God has given you at least one other spiritual gift, and you can find examples of such gifts in Romans 12:6ff and 1 Corinthians 12-14. They are not to be used simply for your own enjoyment but to edify others. Use whatever gift you have to minister to other believers.

Furthermore, as you minister to others, one primary goal should be to:

D. Strengthen Other Believers - Paul says in the last of v.11 that his goal was to minister “some spiritual gift to strengthen you,” or more literally, “that you may be established” (NKJV). The passive indicates to me that Paul understood that their strengthening came from God through the instrumentality of His servants. Paul wanted to use the Word of God and the gifts of the Spirit to impart spiritual depth in the lives of the believers in Rome. Let me share a few other examples of how that word “strengthen” is used. In 1 Thess. 3:2 Paul wrote that he “sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God... to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.” God uses other Christians to strengthen us. One of the most important instruments for strengthening our Christian lives is the ministry of the Word. In 2 Peter 1:12 Peter said he wrote his letter “to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.” When we are new believers, we are spiritually weak and certainly need strengthening (1 Peter 2:2). Even

⁴ This is the only time Paul uses this specific combination of words.

more mature believers are subject to being led astray by doctrinal error and temptation and need to be well grounded in the truth of God's Word. The old hymn says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." May we be strengthened by other believers and by God's Word to stand strong in the face of temptation, trials and doctrinal error.

One way we strengthen others is by encouraging them. Paul says in v.12, "that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith..." Sometimes we get discouraged and are prone to quit following Jesus faithfully. We need someone to come alongside and encourage us in our faith. In fact, the word translated "be mutually encouraged" (*sumparakaleo*) literally means "to call along side with." We all need encouragement. Will you this day commit to strengthening other believers by encouraging them with Scripture, with your prayers, and with your presence?

Finally, there is another principle I see here regarding and edifying ministry to other believers:

E. Minister to Your Leaders - Notice that Paul did not say that this ministry of edification would be one-sided. He tactfully said in v.12, "that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine." Paul not only hoped to impart a blessing to the Roman Christians, but also to receive one for himself through his fellowship with them. He anticipated mutual edification. What an expression of humility coming from one of the greatest theologians of all time! (Cf. 1 Peter 5:2-5; Php. 2:3). Can't you imagine many prominent preachers coming to a church, expecting the edifying ministry to be one-sided?

I perceive that as I minister to this church, this church is going to minister to me. I am going to learn from you. I look forward to that reality as expressed in this text of Scripture. Paul clearly indicates that all believers are capable of edifying others. The same Holy Spirit that is in me is in you. Now since that is true, let me give you some ideas of how you can minister edification and encouragement to me as I minister to you the Word of God. Your presence encourages me. I am encouraged when I can see that you are actively engaged in receiving the Word that I am preaching and teaching. After the service feel free to share insights or illustrations in your own personal life of the truths of our Scripture text. Share with me answers to prayer and how you have seen God work in your life. I am especially encouraged when I see people not only receive the truth, but also believe it and act upon it. The apostle John said in 3 John 1:4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." So let me encourage everyone of you who is a believer to pray for the opportunity of imparting spiritual truth to someone else, including your leaders, to encourage them and to build up their faith.

At a previous meeting I asked the Elders for a suggestion or two regarding visitation. One suggestion that I received was to visit a homebound member of a church. Somehow I missed the part about him being in a skilled nursing facility, and his wife explained that he cannot be visited at the present time. I had planned to visit and minister to them, but as I spoke with his wife on the phone and heard several expressions of her strong faith, I want you to know that she ministered at least as much to me as I to her.

Conclusion: So I call upon the church to minister edification to one another through prayer, by your example, through personal ministry, and by the exercise of your spiritual gifts. Don't forget to minister to your leaders. Such ministry should be mutual, not one-sided. God has given you the resources you need. You have the Holy Spirit. You have a spiritual gift. You have the privilege of prayer. May you help this church to be known for its strong faith, and known as a church that edifies one another! Ask God to show you who He wants you to minister to this week.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 1, “Man’s Ruin” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2022; John MacArthur, Jr., *Acting on the Good News: Study Notes on Romans 1:1-16* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway, Good News Publishers, 2001).

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