

Sermons through

Romans

That You May Be Established

Romans 1:11-12

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
3/25/2012*

That You May Be Established

Romans 1:11-12

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ¹⁰ making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established – ¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me (Romans 1:8-12).

Introduction

Last week I mentioned that the elders in this church have two types of meetings. Though both are ministerial, one tends to focus on the business of the church while the other is a time of sharing and praying for the congregation. How should ministers pray? What should they have as a goal for those whom they serve?

Review

In quick review we read, both in Greek and English, the first word of Paul's introduction is "first" as if to say that prior to all the correction in life and doctrine that he'll be addressing, he wants his readers to know how thankful he is to God for their faith – God being the giver of it. Paul thanks God "through Jesus Christ." All interaction with God is through a Mediator, who is Jesus Christ, our High Priest. Paul's intimate statement of God being "My (his) God" comes from Paul having righteousness that is not his own but from Christ.

Paul encourages the Christians in Rome that their faith is spoken of throughout the world then calls God as his witness that he prays without ceasing for them – desiring the visit them in person. It might be worth mentioning that to pray without ceasing can mean a continual attitude of prayer but more likely (since Paul appeared to have set specific times aside for prayer [2 Corinthians 12:8; Daniel 6:10] and may not have approached prayer as casually as we often do) a regular practice of prayer; e.g. to

exercise without ceasing wouldn't mean that you don't sleep or eat – it simply means you never give up.

Also, Paul submits to the will of God in his prayer with the words **“somehow by the will of God.”** He recognized God's answers to his prayers are always superior to the prayers themselves and warmly embraces that.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” – ¹⁴yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil (James 4:13-16).

Like a good child making a request of a wise parent, there should always be acknowledgment of the love and wisdom of the parent and a willingness to affectionately receive the answer. Paul will continue his introduction, but I thought it would behoove us to take a quick look at how this minister would pray for those under his care.

Prayers of Paul

In our prayer time we find ourselves praying for the sick, as we should. But in 120 from now (I'm pushing it out there for the sake of comfort) everyone prayed for and everyone praying will have left this world – even if those prayers are answered just as asked.

Paul's prayers are too numerous and intricate to examine in detail, but I thought we might just get a feel for his prayers with a cursory examination of three of them (to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians). I do think this will speak somewhat to our current passage since they will reveal how Paul might help define what it means to “be established” (vs 11). Paul's prayer for the Ephesians:

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God

of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.²² And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church,²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:15-22).

Clearly far too much content to sift through in detail, but it would appear that Paul's desire for these Christians is not so much for them to have something, but to know things:

- A knowledge of God and the hope of His calling
- The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints
- The exceeding greatness of His power toward us
- The knowledge of the power and authority of Christ.

Sometimes we're like children. We have homes, food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, the Wi and the Nintendo...but we really want the Xbox. When we don't get it we complain that we don't have anything. Parents pray their children will grow to understand and appreciate what they have and the sacrifices made to have it. Paul's prayer seems similar.

Paul's prayer for the Philippians:

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;⁷ just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my

chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ⁸ For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. ⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:3-11).

This prayer does include references to their behavior. But even then it's a behavior generated by their knowledge of God – the God who began their work of faith and will complete it. Paul prays that their love may abound:

- In particular that their love may abound in knowledge and discernment
- That their love may not be mere emotional gushing but a wise and discriminating love
- A love that can approve the things that are excellent and by contrast expose the opposite (Ephesians 5:11).

Finally to the Colossians:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:9-14).

Again, we see in Paul's prayer for those under his care his a combination of his prayer for things they should know alongside things they should do or be. Paul prays:

- That they be filled with the knowledge of God's will.
- That they might have spiritual understanding.
- In the light of this knowledge that they are to walk...to seek to live a life "pleasing" to God.
- Fruitful in every good work.

And then Paul goes back to the knowledge of God, as if an increased knowledge of God has a natural outpouring:

- Strengthened,
- Patience
- Longsuffering with joy
- Thankfulness

All this with a recognition our inheritance and what we have been delivered from and to, i.e. the power of darkness and into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

In short, it would appear that Paul is as much, if not more concerned, with the faithful knowing who they are, over and above (but not in opposition to) what they do.

There is, no doubt, a "**here am I, send me**" (Isaiah 6:8) sentiment Christians should have. But before that and continually with that, there must be a "**who is God, who am I, and what has God done in His Son**" that travels with the Christian in all of his ventures.

We think of the Apostles spending three years with Jesus before the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension – time of intense instruction before they were sent forth in their apostolic duty. We think of them as strong and viable. But do we not think that, given the opportunity, they would drop everything – even in the midst of ministry – to sit at His feet and imbibe His words with even greater thirst than when they were fledglings?

But this glorious task, of presenting Christ, to give mankind the opportunity to sit at the feet of Christ has been given to Christ's church. This was Paul's passion – to know nothing among those to whom he

sought to minister “**except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**” (1 Corinthians 2:2). And this brings us back to our text.

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established – ¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me (Romans 1:11, 12).

To See You

I am the first to admit that the vast majority of my time, as a minister, is before some type of screen; studying for and writing sermons and messages; e-mailing; texting; etc. But at least a few times a week there is face to face interaction. I’m a bit concerned that seven out of ten people walking down the street are looking at the cell-phones. I wonder where young people’s comfort with texting over talking may lead. I am sure, like all things, there is some good and some bad.

But Paul was not satisfied with a mere letter. Humans are designed to give and receive some type of personal or tactile interaction. I don’t think “spiritual gift” Paul writes of was some uniquely apostolic miracle since he always mentions being on receiving end of the encouragement as well.

Jumping to the very end of Romans, Paul will, numerous times, instruct the church in the social activity of greeting one another – the Greek word meaning to engage in hospitable recognition of another. Whether it’s family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, there is no substitute for the intimacy and encourage we find in someone’s physical presence. Paul viewed this as necessary for them to be “established.”

Established

What does it mean to be established? The word means to be strengthened or solidified. Jesus uses the word to described the “great gulf fixed” between heaven and hell (Luke 16:26). And whatever it means Paul seems to think that the establishing or strengthening is something God does according to the gospel (Romans 16:25).

We might think that to be established or strengthened or solidified means to live a righteous and pious life and it certainly would include that, but what Paul prays and what Paul will labor throughout this entire epistle

is the presentation of an unadulterated understanding of God, His grace, His fulfilled promise/covenant, man's sin and desperate need for what only Christ can provide.

At a certain level it is a simple message—the simplicity of the Gospel. God is glorified by Jesus who came to save sinners. But it so easily becomes a muddled affair: So should sinners keep on sinning? Isn't there something I can offer God to remove my sin? If so, what? If not, why bother not sinning? What about baptism? What about my continual battle with sin? What if I still feel guilty? What about God's promises to Israel? How should I respond to authority and on and on?

The gospel becomes like the home plate in a baseball game. All the action revolves around it until it gets so covered with dirt that no one can see it. Some Christians and some churches are content with that. They play the game without perceiving any need for home plate. But Paul, by the Spirit of God, is like the umpire who from time to time in the writing of these epistles, pulls out his broom and brushes away the dust.

The Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, wants us to be established. And our greatest enemy is deceit—the sin from which the other sins flow. "Has God indeed said?" worked well at the dawn of man to cast us into death and it still works. The devil is a liar, Jesus taught, and the father of lies.

Last week in our question and answer time we discussed a statement made by a well meaning Christian friend. In an effort to place doctrine into a secondary category he asked "What is more important, what we are believing or what we are becoming?" As was pointed out, there is a false dichotomy in the question, but I hope we all appreciate what a dangerous notion this fellow is promoting. We will become what we believe and if we don't know what we believe we have no idea what we should become or how we'll get there.

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul writes of God's will for the direction of His children.

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of

Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ (Ephesians 4:11-15).

Again, too much here to go into detail; suffice it to say that all these offices (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) have instruction as their prime directive. Notice also the enemy: unsound doctrine, trickery of men, cunning craftiness, deceitful plotting.

Someone recently shared what it feels like to interact with someone who has no regard for the truth. “It’s like playing chess with a pigeon” they said, “no matter how good of a move you make they simply knock over all the pieces then strut around like they’ve won.” It can be a little frustrating and one can be tempted to either give up or actually start believing the pigeon. I think Paul is writing to keep them/us from believing the pigeon.

Mutual Encouragement

Paul doesn’t desire to visit them merely to establish them but to be encouraged by them. Paul may have been encouraged due to their being established – like a parent who rejoices when they see the maturity of the child blossom. Whatever the case may be, Paul, the great apostle, was not above being ministered to and encouraged by those who had less mature faith than himself.

It would appear that ministers have a responsibility to enjoy and be encouraged by their congregations and congregations have a responsibility to make this a somewhat easy task (Hebrews 13:17) **“till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).**

Questions for Study

1. Review the Apostle Paul's introduction. What points stand out to you and why (pages 2, 3)?
2. How did Paul pray for the churches? What appeared to be a priority? Why do you suppose that is (pages 3-6)?
3. Paul wanted to go to Rome? Why? What difference does it make to see people in person (page 7)?
4. Paul desired the Christians in Rome be "established." What does that mean and how is it accomplished (pages 7-9)?
5. Discuss the relationship between ministers and congregations. What should they both seek to be to one another (page 9)?