



## The Epistle to the Romans

### Lesson Number 2



## PAUL'S DESIRE TO COME TO ROME

<sup>1:8</sup>First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. <sup>9</sup>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; <sup>10</sup>Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. <sup>11</sup>For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; <sup>12</sup>That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. <sup>13</sup>Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. <sup>14</sup>I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. <sup>15</sup>So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. (Romans 1:8-15, KJV)

## INTRODUCTION

### LESSON OUTLINE

- I. FIRST THINGS FIRST (1:8)
- II. DIVINE WITNESS AND SERVICE (1:9)
- III. THE REQUEST (1:10)
- IV. A NOBLE OBJECTIVE (1:11)
- V. THE POWER OF MUTUAL FAITH (1:12)
- VI. UNFULFILLED PURPOSE (1:13)
- VII. THE GOSPEL DEBT (1:14)
- VIII. DETERMINED TO PREACH (1:15)

Having heard of the saints of Rome, the Apostle writes to them. He does so as an Apostle, fulfilling His Apostolic office. While Paul traveled the world preaching to both Jews and Gentiles, he only wrote to the people of God—those who were in Christ Jesus. This is the society most endeared to the Lord. As it is written, “*Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify*

*for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works*”<sup>NKJV</sup> (Tit 2:14). And again, “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people*”<sup>NKJV</sup> (1 Pet 2:9). These are the people upon whom God’s attention is placed. They are the ones who are fed and led by the Lord Jesus Christ, and for whom He faithfully intercedes. They, and they alone, have been given God’s Holy Spirit, and are properly called “*the sons of God*” (Gal 4:6; 1 John 3:1-2). Paul had the

Divine perspective of the saints, and was therefore aggressive to bring spiritual advantage to them. After all, that is why the Apostolic gift was given: *“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ . . .”* (Eph 4:11-16).

All of this may appear quite obvious, requiring no affirmation. However, this is not at all a common perception in our time. The burden of religious emphasis is being placed on recruitment, with all manner of fanciful explanations for it. But this was not the Apostolic emphasis. The Apostles declared the Gospel with great power to rulers and common people, in market places and synagogues, among barbarians and the cultured. But the thrust of their ministry was toward the saints, who faithfully continued in their *“doctrine”* (Acts 2:42).

We must not take this indispensable ministry for granted. The unacceptable level Scriptural knowledge in the average church is the direct result of its emphasis. Much of the preaching and teaching that is heard does not leave one with the dominating persuasion that we *“live by every Word of God”* (Lk 4:4). But when you read the doctrine of the Apostles, that comes across with great power.

Throughout this book there will be a strong appeal to the Scriptures. Affirmations will be buttressed with the Word of God, and we will be told the Scriptures were written for our learning, that we might experience endurance and encouragement through them (15:4). We will be fed with the Word of God.

**THE CONTEXT ESTABLISHED**

With spiritual expertise, Paul has established the true context of this book.

In his introduction (vs 1-7), he makes no reference to the social or political climate of either Rome or Corinth, from which he wrote. He has elevated their thinking above *“this present evil world,”* and assisted them into the heavenly realms. He has set the tone for the Epistle, thus opening the door for the Lord to work among the people. Do you remember his

Eighteen contextual statements that have nothing whatsoever to do with geography, social issues, political boundaries, or congregational difficulties. All of these are common to all saints of all ages. All of them center in God, Christ Jesus, and the purpose of God. There is no church or age to which they do not apply.

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opening references?

- A servant of Jesus Christ (1:1a).
- The call to Apostleship (1:1b).
- His separation to the Gospel of God (1:1c).
- The promise of God (1:2a).
- The prophets of God (1:2b).
- The Holy Scriptures (1:2c).
- His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1:3a).
- The Seed of David (1:3b).
- The declaration of the Son of God (1:4a).
- The Son God with power (1:4b).
- The resurrection of Christ from the dead (1:4c).
- Paul’s reception of grace and apostleship (1:5a).
- Obedience that comes from faith (1:5b).
- For the sake of Christ’s name (1:5c).
- Those who are called to Christ (1:6).
- Those beloved of God (1:7a).
- Called to be saints (1:7b).
- Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7c).

Thus our minds have been directed into green pastures, and beside still waters. We have been brought up higher. We see Paul in his heavenly assignment. We see the Gospel in its association with God. We see the Prophets, and the Scriptures as the appointed container of truth. Jesus is declared in relation to God, His promise to David, and the focus of the Prophets. The purpose of Paul’s ministry is affirmed to be the obedience that comes from faith. The people of God are told who they are, and why they have been called. What a marvelous perspective.

We need not look for the context of this book! It has been declared for us. What is written is given to us with God, Christ, the Gospel, and our call to Jesus in mind. Those verities will stabilize everything affirmed in this Epistle to our hearts. In their light, it will all have spiritual power, make sense to us, and nourish our hearts. I do not cease to marvel at the consistent manner in which Scripture was written.

**FIRST THINGS FIRST**

***“1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”*** The one in fellowship with Jesus is sensitive of, and thankful for, the working of the Lord. In a grand confession of this truth, Isaiah wrote, *“all*

*that we have accomplished you have done for us”<sup>NIV</sup>* (Isa 26:12). Apostolic doctrine confirms this with great effectiveness. *“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose”<sup>NIV</sup>* (Phil 2:13). Thus holy men prayed for Divine working to take place believers—for

the Lord to work in them what was pleasing in His sight. *“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in*

us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever"<sup>NIV</sup> (Heb 13:20-21). God is honored by a due recognition of His own work. Thus the Apostle begins with a thank offering for the accomplishments in the brethren in Rome.

Like all who are in Christ Jesus, the brethren in Rome were the "workmanship" of God Himself, "created in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:10). They were His own creation in the Son.

### I THANK MY GOD

Thanksgiving ranks high in the Kingdom of God. It is directly related with being in the body of Christ. "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col 3:15). Our prayers and supplications are to be attended "with thanksgiving" (Phil 4:6). The Spirit speaks of overflowing with thanksgiving (Col 2:7). Words of thanksgiving are pointedly compared with speaking that is not acceptable. "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, **but rather giving of thanks**"<sup>NKJV</sup> (Eph 5:3-4). There is no question, therefore, about the role of thanksgiving in the life of the believer.

The extent of our thanks can be seen in the passage before us. Believers might be tempted to limit thanksgiving to benefits they have personally received. And, indeed, such benefits must be acknowledged in grateful thankfulness to God. But what about thanking God for brethren you have not seen, or for a body of believers you have never visited? What about giving thanks for a group that has never supported your ministry, or sent you a letter, or been devoted to your work? Now there is real sensitivity to God, and evidence of a selfless spirit as well.

And why is Paul so quick to give thanks to God? It is because he is sensitive to the working of the Lord. He knows the origin of faith, and the Cause behind conversion.

### FOR YOU ALL

The Apostle does not give thanks for the

leaders, or for the more gifted, but for them "all." They are "all" the "workmanship" of God. They have all believed, and had been placed in the body where God was pleased to place them.

Paul said much the same thing to the Thessalonians. "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting"<sup>NKJV</sup> (2 Thess 1:3). To the Ephesians he wrote, "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you" (Eph 1:16). The Colossians were told, "We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Col 1:3).

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Faith enables the soul to recognize the work of God, and therefore give thanks for it. It is important to note that God is not thanked for something He did not do. Believers are the result of Divine working, and it is comely to give thanks to God for them.

Later he will say to the Roman brethren, "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered"<sup>NKJV</sup> (Rom 6:17).

Here is an aspect of spiritual life that could be afforded greater prominence among the people of God.

### FAITH THAT IS SPOKEN OF

What is the thing that provokes such thanksgiving to God? It is not the administrative genius of the brethren in Rome. Nor, indeed, is it any form of institutional achievement or appearance. Rather, it is the report of their FAITH, which was "spoken of throughout the

world."

It was the consistent manner of the Apostle to give thanks for the FAITH of God's people—something rarely heard among professing believers. Thanks was given for the Thessalonians because their faith was growing "exceedingly" (2 Thess 1:3). When Paul heard of the "faith" of the Ephesians, he ceased not to give thanks for them (Eph 1:15). The same was said of the Colossians (Col 1:4).

The Thessalonians also had a faith that was spoken of throughout the world. "Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything" (1 Thess 1:8).

Timothy brought "good tidings" of the "faith" of the Thessalonians to Paul, thereby provoking thanksgiving through him (1 Thess 3:6-9).

Giving thanks for believing brethren is an expression of spiritual insight, for faith does come from God. It is "given" unto men to believe (Phil 1:29), and faith is "obtained" through the righteousness of God (2 Pet 1:1). It is truly "by grace" that we have believed (Acts 18:27). The Spirit affirms of the Lord Jesus that it is "Through Him you believe in God" (1 Pet 1:21). This is why those with spiritual understanding give thanks to God wherever faith is perceived.

One might well ask the question, "What are churches noted for today?" It is our prayer that it will be their faith. I have been in many an assembly where unbelief was more evident than faith. However, we are part of a Covenant that makes no allowance for unbelief.

I gather the faith of these good brethren was of note among the people of God, for they alone would recognize it as faith. **Only those who treasure faith speak favorably of its presence in others.**

The world is not able to receive those who are not its own. As the Lord said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). If any servant of God seeks to please men, he abruptly ceases to serve

God at precisely the point he seeks to please men. As it is written, *"If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ"* (Gal 1:10).

## DIVINE WITNESS AND SERVICE

***"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."*** Being "joined" to the Lord and in fellowship with His Son (1 Cor 1:9), Paul speaks of God with a refreshing familiarity. Rather than shrinking back from the living God with a smitten conscience, he calls the Lord to be his witness—to attest that what he is saying is precisely the truth.

### GOD IS MY WITNESS

A similar expression, and even stronger, is found in Second Corinthians 1:23. *"Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand."*<sup>NKJV</sup> I give this text because of its contrast with the one in Romans. Because of the sorrow brought to the Apostle by the conditions at Corinth, he *"came no more to Corinth."* He calls God to witness *"against"* his soul is this is not the truth. In the case of the Romans, he desires to come to them because of the report of their faith, and calls God to attest that this is the truth.

This is a form of oath, frequently used in Scripture. In his indictment of Israel, Moses called heaven and earth to witness against them (Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28). Other prophets used a similar oath (Mic 1:2; 2 Chron 18:13).

In so speaking, God Himself is summoned to attest to the truth of what is being said. It is not that such a summons causes God to hear what is affirmed. All things are *"naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do"* (Heb 4:13), whether we acquiesce to it or not. This expression joyfully submits to Divine appraisal, knowing it will confirm the truth of what is being said. Only one with faith can speak in such a manner.

In a practical way, this manner of speaking confirms the deep interest of the Apostle in the believers in Rome. He was not writing out of a mere sense of obligation, or in the role of a Kingdom official, as it were. In becoming a laborer together with God (1 Cor 3:9), the heart of Paul was knit to his work.

### SERVING WITH MY SPIRIT

Paul now draws attention to what he is doing. He is not communicating as a mere friend, or as a member of the same religious institution. Nor, indeed, is he writing as an authority who has *"dominion"* over their faith (2 Cor 1:14). He is writing as a servant of the Lord—a representative of the Lord of glory.

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### Serving

The word *"serve"* is an elevated word, and refers to the kind of service introduced under the law—the **ministry of the priests** in the Tabernacle service. This particular word is used twenty-two times in the New Covenant Scriptures, and is **always associated with worship** (Matt 4:10; Lk 1:74; 2:37; 4:8; Acts 7:7,42; 24:14; 26:7; 27:23; Rom 1:9,25; Phil 3:3; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 8:5; 9:9, 14; 10:2; 12:28' 13:10; Rev 7:15; 22:3). The only reference to idolatrous worship is found in Romans 1:25: *"who worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator."*

The point to be seen is that *"serve"* does not refer to unwilling or forced servitude. It is not the mere carrying out of an obligation. This is the New Covenant manner of *"worship"*—serving the Lord. It is putting His interests above our own because of our acceptance by Him. Such service parallels that of the priests of old, who moved about in the holy place *accomplishing the service of God"* (Heb 9:6 ").

### With my spirit

Paul's service is not by rote, or lifeless routine—something altogether too common in the average church. The *"spirit"* in a person is their essential part. Just as the body is the most outward part of our being, so the *"spirit"* is the most inner part of us. The verse could also read *"with my whole heart,"* as it does in the NIV, or *"with everything that I am in Christ Jesus."*

Here is the part that is instructed by God. As it is written, *"there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding"* (Job 32:8). Pharaoh recognized this type of knowledge in Joseph. He said of him, *"Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art"* (Gen 41:39). This was also said of the four young men who were taken in the Babylonian captivity (Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah): *"God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams"* (Dan 1:17).

This type of tutelage and understanding cannot come through mere mental disciplines or erudition. Just as the Spirit *"bears witness with our spirit,"* confirming we are the children of God (Rom 8:16), so God teaches our spirits the realities of the Kingdom of God. When that essential part of our persons drives our service to God, we are serving Him

with our spirit.

This is a higher form of service. It involves faith, confidence, and persuasion. The love of Christ compels such service, and the threat of rejection or militant opposition cannot quench it. Not only is it higher, it is the only acceptable service.

There is no pretension in the person serving God with their spirit. This is not professional duty, but service from the heart. Tragically, there is such a thing as a religious mask—a form of pretension that finds one speaking for God, yet not possessing a compelling love for Him. In Christ, such ostentatiousness is altogether out of order and unacceptable. In a world of professionalized clergy and institutionalized religion, this is difficult for some to receive. Nevertheless, it is the truth. God will accept no service that is not “with” our “spirit.”

The service of reference is mentioned in the third chapter of Philippians—one of the hallmark descriptions of the saints of God. “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). Why is the Holy Spirit mentioned in Philippians, and Paul’s spirit in Romans? It is because the Holy Spirit is the Divine Animator, as it were, of the human spirit. He is the One who imparts the life and the understanding. Because it flows out of the human spirit, our service is also said to be “with my spirit.” This is a glorious confirmation of the reality of our reconciliation to God.

#### SERVING IN THE GOSPEL

See with what spiritual precision the Apostle speaks. His service is not in the “church,” but “in the Gospel.” This expression means he served God by preaching, or declaring the Gospel. Some versions accent this perspective. “I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son.”<sup>NIV</sup> “Whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son.”<sup>NRSV</sup> “Whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son.”<sup>NASB</sup>

The Gospel has no power for the individual until it is preached, or declared. But when it is declared, or

articulated, it is attended by Divine power to such an extent that the Gospel itself becomes “the power of God UNTO salvation” (Rom 1:16). It is not the power of God to effect political change, marital stability, or economic soundness. Rather, it is the means by which men are extricated from sin, become righteous before God, and have their names written in heaven. That is what “salvation” is all

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about, and Paul was serving that interest.

By serving “in the Gospel,” Paul’s ministry contributed to the salvation of men—not only initially, but in bringing them to perfection. The ministry of “the Apostle of the Gentiles” has absolutely no relevance in a business environment, a military strategy, or a political agenda. All of those are centered in this world. The Gospel comes from another realm, and prepares men for “the world to come.” O, that God would raise up a mighty army of Gospel proclaimers in our generation!

Paul had not only believed and embraced the Gospel, he was a participant in it. Having died and been buried with Jesus, He was now living with Him. For him, the “newness of life” had carried him into a labor that focused on the Gospel, and compelled him to speak and write it.

#### THE GOSPEL OF HIS SON

Behold with what care the Spirit speaks! There is such a thing as “another gospel: which is not another” (Gal 1:6-7). Some declare a gospel of “health and wealth.” Others announce a prosperity gospel, while some speak of the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. There are even some who entertain a gospel of the Sabbath day. Even further down the ladder of spiritual

delusion, there are benighted souls who deliver a gospel announcing God is pledged to solve all of our problems.

#### The Record

However, the real Gospel concerns the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord: “the Gospel of His Son.” This is nothing less than the salient and good news of the accomplishments and current ministry of Jesus in the behalf of men. John called it “the record that God gave of his Son,” identifying it even further: “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:10-11).

The word “record,” as used in First John, is a powerful one. Other versions use the word “witness”<sup>NKJV, NASB</sup> or “testimony.”<sup>NIV, NRSV</sup> Interestingly, the literal meaning of the word used here (**marturian**) is “evidence given,”<sup>Strongs</sup> or “objective information given in proof of something.” Herein is a marvelous truth. The powerful evidence of the Person, accomplishments, and ministry of Jesus is not to be found in a vision. It is not hidden in the archaeological evidences uncovered by men. Here is evidence, or proof, of a higher order.

The corroborating evidence of God Himself, concerning His Son, is a **message!** It is the Gospel, or good news, of His Son. As simplistic as that may sound, it is far from artificial or on the surface of thought. Here is God’s proof of His Son—a **proclamation!**

The centrality of the Gospel of God’s Son makes provision for the entrance of faith. It is the message through which faith is brought to us. As it is written, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:14-17).

**PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING**

"God is my witness . . . that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." I vividly recall when it first registered upon my spirit that this passage did not fit well into my theology. I had accepted the view that the primary interest of God was the lost, and that the loftiest concern of the servant of God was those outside of Christ. It all sounded innocent enough, and, given a twist or two, some Scriptures seemed to support the view. Our Father certainly did "so love the world," providing for its salvation (John 3:16). Jesus did come "to seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10), and admonished His disciples to pray "the Lord of the harvest," that He would "send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matt 9:38). These are precious affirmations.

The ministry of Jesus and Apostolic doctrine confirm the concentration of Divine power and interest is devoted to the church—the body of Christ! The most insightful teaching of Jesus was directed to His disciples. His most sensitive disclosures of the truth were to them. The Holy Spirit is given to the people of God, and He bears witness with their spirit, and intercedes for them (Rom 8:16,26). The Lord Jesus "ever lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). Every spiritual gift is given for the edifying of the body (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Cor 12:7). The body of Christ is appropriately described as "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23). It is the repository for everything Jesus has to give.

This is not unrelated to our subject. Paul calls God to witness that he "always" makes mention of the brethren in Rome in his prayers. It is as though he said that mentioning the believers in Rome was appropriate in all of his prayers. Among other things, that reveals the churches were a prevailing concern for the Apostle. He was the "Apostle to the Gentiles," and took that to include edifying believers among all nations.

We will find in this Epistle that as soon as Paul heard of the faith of a body of people, he was compelled to edify them, building them up in the most holy faith.

He brought them into his prayers, and into his purpose and calling as well.

**How Paul Prayed**

We are not left to conjecture concerning the content of Paul's prayers for believers. They follow the same pattern of our Lord's final intercessory prayer upon earth: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:9). These are a "special people" to God, and there to the

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Apostle as well. Any lack of regard for believers reveals a lack of regard for God.

**The Ephesians**

The letter to the Ephesians contains words almost identical to those of our text: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph 1:15-16). And how did he pray for those brethren? "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph 1:17-19).

Another prayer for the Ephesians is recorded in the third chapter of that book. "That he would grant you, according to the

riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, maybe able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (3:16-19).

**The Colossians**

Upon hearing of the faith and love among the Colossian brethren, Paul set himself to pray for them. He shares with us the focus and substance of those prayers. "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Col 1:9-11).

**The Thessalonians**

An Apostolic prayer for the Thessalonians is also recorded for our edification. "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 1:11-12).

**Hebrew Believers**

Another poignant prayer is recorded in the book of Hebrews. It is beautiful in both expression and content, revealing the Kingdom manner. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21).

**Summation**

The manner of Paul's prayers for the people of God are evident, bringing great solace to the hungry heart. They reveal the will of God for His people, and the type of prayers that are in order for all saints everywhere in our time. A brief summation of those prayers will serve to prepare us for the remainder of this book.

- \_ That God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Himself.
- \_ That God would open the eyes of their understanding, or heart.
- \_ That they would know the hope to which God has called them.
- \_ That they would see the rich glory of God's inheritance in the saints.
- \_ That believers would comprehend the greatness of the power that is devoted to them.
- \_ That they would be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man.
- \_ That Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith.

- \_ That they would be rooted and grounded in love.
- \_ That they would comprehend the marvelous extent of their salvation.
- \_ That they would know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.
- \_ That they would be filled with all the fulness of God.
- \_ That they would be filled with the knowledge of His will.
- \_ That they would walk worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all things.
- \_ That they would be fruitful in every good work.
- \_ That they would increase in the knowledge of God.
- \_ That they would be strengthened with all might according to His glorious power.
- \_ That they would possess all patience, or endurance, and longsuffering WITH joyfulness.
- \_ That God would count them worthy of calling.
- \_ That God would fulfill all of the good

- pleasure of His goodness in them.
- \_ That God would fulfill the work of faith with power in them.
- \_ That the name of Christ would be glorified in them.
- \_ That God would make them perfect in every good work, to do His will.
- \_ That God would work in them what is pleasing in His sight.

Although by no means an exhaustive list, there are twenty-three things prayed for the church—the body of Christ. They are all pointing in the same direction: perfection in Christ Jesus. Stated another way, being prepared for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:7).

Throughout this book, its doctrinal tone will confirm the Apostolic agenda is to make the saints of God strong in the faith. This circumstance should encourage us to also seek the spiritual welfare of the those who are in Christ Jesus.

## THE REQUEST

***"<sup>10</sup>Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you."*** Not only does Paul confirm he prays for the people of God, he will also make known the nature of some of his prayers for himself. In both views—prayers for the saints and prayers for himself—we will see the centrality of the Kingdom of God in his thinking. Other than things directly related to his Apostleship, we know very little about the personal circumstances of Paul. Because his life was not wrapped up in himself, but in the Lord, he spoke and wrote little of himself. Yet, from time to time, and as it related to his Apostolic office, he would share some of his personal requests to God. They were all made within the context of salvation, and Paul's role in the eternal purpose of God.

### MAKING REQUEST

Humility is seen in this statement: a "request" was made. While I do not desire to linger on this point, a request is "made" when it is thoughtfully presented to the Lord. Job spoke of ordering his "cause" before the Lord, presenting his case as a

spiritual lawyer (Job 23:4). The mind is engaged in such a request, and desires are matched, or laid along side, the "good and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2). It is never acceptable to pray independently of the will of God, or purely out of selfish interests. "Making" a request involves an acute awareness of this

Notice the manner in which the Lord urges us to pray. It confirms that our requests are presented with the salvation of God in mind. *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all*

**There is a spirit of self-interest that has risen to dominate the average church. Like a defiling deluge, it has washed God-consciousness from the people. The church is now being inundated with preaching that is filled with psychological jargon and worldly perspectives. Prayers for the church rarely rise above the level of mere earthly circumstance. It is a tragic situation, and has not occurred suddenly.**

when coming before the Lord of glory.

God has invited His people to make requests of Him. Even though God knows the hearts of men, having intimate knowledge of all of their thoughts (Matt 12:25; Heb 4:13), He still urges us to make our requests "known" to Him—articulating them in His presence.

*understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6-7).* Our prayers are to be bundled with thanksgiving, thus emphasizing that we pray as recipients of the good things of God. The conferment of the "peace of God" upon us, and the maintenance of good hearts and minds "through Jesus Christ" corroborate that God works all things with

a mind to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus *"with eternal glory."*

I have taken the time to briefly state these things because of the times in which we live—or the generation we have been given to *"serve"* (Acts 13:36). There is a spirit of self-interest that has risen to dominate the average church. Like a defiling deluge, it has washed God-consciousness from the people. The church is now being inundated with preaching that is filled with psychological jargon and worldly perspectives. Prayers for the church rarely rise above the level of mere earthly circumstance. It is a tragic situation, and has not occurred suddenly.

The relevance of this condition should be very apparent to us. **God simply will not work for the advantage of those who are basically unaware of Him.** For that reason, doubt and unbelief disqualify prayer. That is why requests are to be made *"with thanksgiving"*—with an acute sensitivity to His working and blessing.

We will find that the request Paul makes has absolutely no relevance outside of the purpose of God. It is made within the context of God's purpose and will, and with the spiritual advantage of the saints in mind. Not only had Paul, like all believers, been raised to sit with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), he conducted his life from that vantage point.

**BY ANY MEANS**

The phrase *"by any means"* is frequently found in Scripture (1 Kgs 20:39; Psa 49:7; Lk 10:19; Acts 27:12; Rom 1:10; 11:14; 1 Cor 8:9; 9:27; 2 Cor 11:3; Gal 2:2; Phil 3:11; 1 Thess 2:3). Other versions read, *"by some means"*<sup>NKJV</sup>, *"at last . . . the way may be opened"*<sup>NIV</sup>, *"somehow by God's will"*<sup>RSV</sup>, *"if in any way"*<sup>Darbys</sup>.

The expression emphasizes the uncertainty of life—from our point of view. God does not lay life's plans before us, detailing every aspect of them—not even for an *"the Apostle to the Gentiles."*

Solomon wrote, *"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day*

*may bring forth"* (Prov 27:1). Speaking through James, the Spirit reminds us to conduct our lives with this in mind. *"Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that"* (James 1:14-15). The Lord Jesus confirmed that this condition should not occasion feelings of futility or remorse. While we neither know nor control tomorrow, it is all in the hands of the Lord of glory. *"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"* (Matt 6:34).

**We will find that the request Paul makes has absolutely no relevance outside of the purpose of God. It is made within the context of God's purpose and will, and with the spiritual advantage of the saints in mind.**

The phrase *"by any means"* reveals the joyful optimism of faith. Paul had made his request known unto God. He knew all to well that the details of his future had not been revealed to him. His heart had also taken hold of the fact that *"with God all things are possible"* (Matt 19:26), and that every available means are under His control. He saw no need to speculate about HOW his request could, or would be, processed by God. Rather, he left the matter with the Lord, willing to accept *"ANY means"* in the fulfillment of his request. I do not question that he remained alert in his spirit for the fulfillment of his request, not expecting it to happen independently of his perception.

While doctrinally a small matter, this phrase—*"if by any means now at last"*<sup>NKJV</sup>—reveals the joyful anticipation of faith, and the settled determination to leave matters in the hands of the Lord. Faith

does affect the entire person.

**A PROSPEROUS JOURNEY**

Precisely what is *"a prosperous journey?"* It is not a journey attended by prosperity, as ordinarily conceived. Rather, it is a journey that is culminated—one in which Paul finally reaches Rome. Other versions highlight this perspective. *" . . . now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you."*<sup>NKJV</sup> *" . . . I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you."*<sup>NRSV</sup>

There is thus a two-fold sense in which the journey would be *"prosperous."* First, that it would be one meeting with the approval and blessing of God (*"by the will of God"*). Secondly, that his desire to see the brethren at Rome would at last be granted. The beloved Apostle thought in terms of his Apostleship: faithfulness to the One who called him, and benefit to the people of God.

**BY THE WILL OF GOD**

Here is an expression that is not common in our day. We live in the midst of a society that has been cultured to think primarily of itself. Self interests are commonly sought above the will of God. There is even a strain of theology that teaches men it is a sign of unbelief to submit our desires to the will of God. Those embracing this nonsense imagine that demanding from God is an indication of strong faith, and that submitting to His will is a sign of unbelief. The supposition is too foolish to recognize or embrace.

The Apostle does not hesitate to submit his request to God's will. He allows for the possibility that there is a higher agenda than his own, and that God's will supercedes his own. The Kingdom of God does not resolve around the desires of men—even holy men. We must make it our business not to lose sight of this.

God's will is the highest expression of will and purpose. No person is ever at a disadvantage to prefer and submit to God's will. David, for example, *"served his own generation by the will of God"* (Acts 13:36). Paul himself was *"called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God"* (1 Cor 1:1). The Lord Jesus *"gave Himself for our sins, that He might*

deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal 1:4). If the will of God was sufficient to effect our salvation, we may rely implicitly upon it in the details of life, and in our desires as well.

The will of God is the environment in

which we can stand "perfect and complete" (Col 4:12). The whole of life in Christ is lived "to the will of God" (1 Pet 4:2). His will is what we seek to "do" (Eph 6:6; Heb 10:36). Faith causes His will to become our will. It knows the will of God is "good, and acceptable, and perfect"

(Rom 12:2). Submitting to God's will is always right, never placing the believer in a spiritual disadvantage. That truth penetrates every level of life—even down to desiring to go to a specific city and be with a particular people, as revealed in this very text.

## A NOBLE OBJECTIVE

**"For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established."** Much of the religion of our day is marked by carnal casualness. It is not centered in the good work of the Lord, and has little to do with edification or bringing spiritual advantage to the people of God. This way of thinking is not the manner of the Kingdom, and should not be dignified as though it was.

In his desire to come to Rome, Paul is not thinking of mere camaraderie, or the promotion of some personal agenda. His reasoning is within the perimeter of the Gospel and His call to declare it to the nations.

### A LONGING

A "longing" is a strong compulsion. Just as the flesh has powerful lusts, the renewed heart has strong longings or desires. For whatever it is worth, the word "long" comes from **ἐπιποθῶ**, which means "Have a great affection, yearn for someone, zealously yearn over." <sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> Paul expressed a similar yearning to the Philippians: "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:8).

This, then, is a compelling desire that produced determinations and strong prayers to God within the Apostle. This is not the expression of a sense of mere duty, or the urge to fulfill an official capacity. This is the very heart of Paul.

The Apostle did not express this desire to everyone. In fact, it is only expressed to the churches in Rome and Philippi. He also spoke to Timothy after this manner: "Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled

with joy" (2 Tim 1:4). The recollection of some churches caused grief and deep concern in the heart of Paul. "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain" (Gal 4:11). "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it" (1 Cor 11:18). But there were some who had endeared themselves to

**It is the prerogative of God's people to be a blessing to all who hear of them. There are some believers who, when they are remembered, cause great longings to rise in their brethren. They are a source of encouragement and consolation to those who live by faith.**

Paul by their faith toward God and love to all saints.

It is the prerogative of God's people to be a blessing to all who hear of them. There are some believers who, when they are remembered, cause great longings to rise in their brethren. They are a source of encouragement and consolation to those who live by faith.

### IMPARTING SOMETHING SPIRITUAL

Paul's longing was not driven by a desire for mere friendship in the flesh. He was seeking the spiritual advantage of the people of God—bringing them to maturity

in Christ. He was also endeavoring to fulfill His appointed ministry.

In this case, the imparting of a spiritual gift does not refer to transferring a spiritual aptitude to someone else: i.e., enabling some of the brethren in Rome to prophesy, work miracles, etc. Rather, it speaks of sharing with the brethren the things he had received from God. The word "impart" does mean to "give over or share," <sup>Barclay-Newman</sup> and is so translated by the NRSV and NIV. Paul desired to share with them what he had received.

Paul desired to minister to the saints what God had ministered unto him. This, of course, is the purpose for spiritual gifts—to profit the people of God through them. As it is written, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" <sup>NKJV</sup> (1 Cor 12:7). It is, as stated in another place, "that the church may receive edification" <sup>NKJV</sup> (1 Cor 14:5).

In stating his desire, Paul confirmed his delight in determining to "excel to the edifying of the church" (1 Cor 14:12). The one imparting spiritual benefit to the people of God through the exercise of the gift given to him, is a good steward of God's grace. As it is written, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 4:10-11).

In my lifetime I have confronted relatively few people who have a driving compulsion to share what they have received from God with His people. This is always an evidence of a lack of faith in God and love for His people. The same Spirit who imparts spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4-9) will, if not quenched, lead the individual to the proper use of them.

It is always appropriate to minister to the earthly needs of God's people, doing good to them (Gal 6:10). It is even better to minister to their spiritual needs, thus preparing them to live triumphantly in this world, and gain the world to come.

**THE OBJECTIVE OF THE IMPARTATION**

And what was the objective sought by the Apostle sharing with them what he had received? It was not simply the fulfilling of an obligation. By the grace of God, Paul had become a participant in the very work of God. His objectives, therefore, aligned with those of God Himself. His ministry to them was "to the end ye may be established."

The word "established" is a key word representing a fundamental aspect of life in Christ Jesus. The word means to set something up so it remains immovable. It is the word used to describe Christ's determination to lay down His life a ransom for many. "And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51). His determination was so evident the Samaritans did not receive Him "because His face was as though he would go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:53). His mind was made up, and He could not be moved from His intention.

**Establishment - A Necessity**

The establishment of the people of God is like that. It means their minds are firmly fixed on the goal, and they cannot be moved from it. They will stand the tests of flood and desert, of drought and fire. Those who are established do not vacillate. They do not waver, and are not double minded. They are reliable, consistent, and faithful under all circumstances.

If you have been in Christ for any length of time, you know how exceedingly rare such individuals are—spiritually established individuals. The early churches, for example, were "established in the faith" by the ministry of Paul and those with him (Acts 16:5). Timothy was sent to the Thessalonians "to establish" them so they would not be "moved" by the "afflictions" they were enduring (1 Thess 3:2).

When Jesus told Peter Satan had desired to sift him, and that He was praying his faith would not fail, He said, "and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk 22:32). This ("strengthen") is the same word, and precisely the same concept. Strengthening the brethren is establishing them in the

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faith, making them solid and immovable in Jesus. It involves feeding the sheep.

God Himself is devoted to this work. As it is written, "But the Lord is faithful, who shall **stablish** you, and keep you from evil" (2 Thess 3:3). And again, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, **stablish**, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet 5:10). And again, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may **stablish** your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thess 3:13). And again, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath

loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and **stablish** you in every good word and work" (2 Thess 2:17).

The Lord has made abundant provision for the stability of His people. He has provided gifts to perfect, or mature them through edification. The determined outcome is that they "be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may **grow up into Him in all things**, which is the Head, even Christ" (Eph 4:11-15).

**No Provision for Juvenility**

There is no provision in Christ for remaining in a state of spiritual juvenility. I am painfully aware that the contemporary church receives stagnant disciples without the slightest twinge of conscience—but God does not. God is not glorified by unstable and ungrounded believers. The Lord Jesus is not honored by followers who are unable to stand, lacking firmness of conviction and the full assurance of faith. These conditions are a reproach to God, and negate any profession of faith. If God has determined we "be no more children," and has made abundant provision that we no longer remain in that state, who is the person who can justify remaining there?

In nature, an eventual lack of maturity is an abnormality, and is so recognized. But in the realm of the Spirit, it is more than an abnormality. In nature, it is possible to be born with deficiencies that make maturity impossible. However, this is not the case in the Spirit. In Christ we become a "new creation," and there are no flaws in that new creation. It progresses from "glory to glory," being changed into the image of Christ by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18). Those who do not eventually mature in Christ are a living contradiction of the very nature of spiritual life. Their status is totally unacceptable.

Thus, through the Spirit, Paul has set the tone for this Epistle. It will contribute to the stability of the brethren. A message will be presented that will ground them in

the faith, and enable them to stand against the wiles of the devil. His aim is to make the saints better, their faith stronger, and their hope clearer.

I cannot leave this section without emphasizing that every ability the Lord

places in the body is designed to contribute to the stability of His people. If what a person is doing in the name of the Lord brings no stabilizing influence to the saints, it has not come from God. It does not deserve to be associated with Jesus. At

the best, it is a fabrication of men, and at the worst a delusion of the devil. Both, of course, are totally unacceptable. It is no wonder that the Apostle extended himself to establish the saints of God. He knew the manner of the Kingdom.

## THE POWER OF MUTUAL FAITH

***"That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."*** While the Apostles were placed "first" in the church (1 Cor 12:28), they are not above the church. They are a part of it, and thus were advantaged by those to whom they ministered. In great tenderness, Paul confesses to this marvelous arrangement. Not only was he desirous to deliver to them what he had received, he was intent upon receiving benefits from them.

It is the nature of faith to bring glory to God and advantage to His people. Just as surely as faith honors God and Christ, bringing great delight to them, it also builds up the saints, bringing edification to them. There is a consistency in this Divine arrangement that never fails. The only way to displease God is to cease to live by faith. Likewise, the only way to fail to bring spiritual benefit to the brethren is to cease walking by faith.

### COMFORT

"Comfort" is one of the premier ministries of the Kingdom of God. The word "comfort" is a large one meaning to encourage, help, console, cheer up, and relieve from sorrow. It presumes warfare, opposition, and fleshly frailty. Interestingly, the word "Comforter" is applied to the Holy Spirit Himself (**paraklhton**—John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7).

It is said of the early church, they "were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). In John 14:16, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "another Comforter," indicating that Jesus Himself was also a "Comforter." In fact, He is called "the Consolation

(**parakhsin**—Comforter) of Israel" (Lk 2:25). In addition, God Himself is declared as He "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation" (2 Cor 1:4). Thus, the entire Godhead is involved in our comfort, encouragement, help, and consolation. Also, the Scriptures are affirmed to have been written that we "that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures

**It is no wonder, therefore, that this is such a significant ministry in the body of Christ. Those who have no interest in ministering comfort and encouragement to the people of God have no reason to expect Divine support in their labors.**

might have hope" (Rom 15:4). Additionally the person who prophesies "speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men" (1 Cor 14:3).

It is no wonder, therefore, that this is such a significant ministry in the body of Christ. Those who have no interest in ministering comfort and encouragement to the people of God have no reason to expect Divine support in their labors.

### The Need for Comfort

Rather than being a spiritual luxury, comfort is a necessity. Our status as strangers in this world (1 Pet 2:11), together with the opposition of Satanic hosts (Eph 6:12), and a contrary law within our members (Rom 7:23), require

the refurbishment of our energies.

Faith is in sharp conflict with the entire world order. As a result it tends to wane without refreshment. The most holy of men have been brought to a status where they "were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that" they even "despaired even of life" (2 Cor 1:8). When one "fights the good fight of faith," there is constant need for building up, encouragement, and comfort. This is one of the many reasons contention among the people of God is so wrong. It tends to tear down rather than build up.

### A Different Word

The word used here is different—a sort of compound word. The KJV translates it "comforted together" (**sumparaklhqh/mai**). Other versions read, "encouraged together" <sup>NKJV, NASB</sup> and "mutually encouraged." <sup>NIV, NRSV</sup> The idea is that of reciprocation—each helping the other.

This is a form of spiritual synergy. Synergy is combined action where one part helps the other part to work better. Our fleshly bodies are an example of this type of Divine design. Thus an Apostle helps the church at Philippi to fulfill their ministry, while a representative from that church helped the Apostle to fulfill his ministry (Phil 2:25-28; 4:18-19).

In this way, the body of Christ is "tempered together" (1 Cor 12:24). The members are, by Divine determination, dependent upon one another. No one of them or group of them possesses all of the things available to them in Christ Jesus.

There are some things that must be "ministered" through those in fellowship

with the Head, Jesus Christ. As it is written, *“the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God”* (Col 2:19).

When Paul says *“comforted together,”* he is speaking of nourishment being ministered and knitting together resulting.

**MUTUAL FAITH**

The means through which *“comforting together”* is accomplished is *“mutual*

No ministry, however lofty, puts one beyond the point where advantage can be realized from other members of Christ’s body. It is important to observe we are not dealing with religious novelties here. Mutual edification is not denominational camaraderie or sectarian fraternity. The edification and strengthening of God’s people cannot be achieved by fleshly means. It can only come through faith, which is our sole means of accessing *“spiritual blessings in heavenly places.”*

A valid congregation of believers is engaged in mutual spiritual improvement.

submitted to its expressions. Who is able to discern the harm brought upon believers by expressions of unbelief! How many times I have heard such words

Jonathan, on the other hand, went to David in the woods *“and strengthened his hand in God”* (1 Sam 23:16). Upon beginning his leadership in Israel, David did the same with his soldiers. *“And now may the LORD show kindness and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness, because you have done this thing. Now therefore, let your hands be strengthened, and be valiant”* <sup>NKJV</sup> (2 Sam 2:6-7). In the early church, Judas and Silas, *“themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words”* <sup>NKJV</sup> Acts 15:32). When Paul and company visited the churches, they *“were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily”* (Acts 16:5). This is the manner of the Kingdom.

In my judgment, there is altogether too much activity in the churches that does not leave believers strengthened, edified, or comforted. Much of the dialog I hear these days is nothing more than academic prattle, or crudely stated opinions. It does not produce spiritual tenacity in the people of God, or lift them up above smoke of the battle field. It is too close to the earth and too far from heaven. It relies upon men, and not upon God.

God has spoken too frequently and with too much clarity for their to be any ignorance on this subject. Edification is a fundamental activity among the faithful, and is not to take second place to other interests. *“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another”* (Rom 14:19). *“Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification”* (Rom 15:2). *“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do”* (1 Thess 5:11). This is the type of activity Paul longed for.

**A valid congregation of believers is engaged in mutual spiritual improvement. A more firm grip upon eternal verity is promoted. Hearts are encouraged to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life. Heaven is made more clear, and earth is pushed into the background.**

*faith.”* Thus, the faith of one saint builds up and encourages the faith of another saint. The faith of an Apostle not only strengthens the faith of a Roman believer, the faith of the Roman believer fortifies the faith of an Apostle. What a marvelous arrangement, and it is available to all!

While measures of faith differ (Rom 12:3), the nature of faith remains the same. There is at least a twofold ministry of faith. First, it appropriates the grace of God, bringing us into God’s favor enabling us to appropriate righteousness (Eph 2:8; Rom 3:22,25; 4:5). Second, it equips the child of God to function within the body of Christ to the benefit of all. This particular verse refers to the latter ministry of faith. Paul will open this truth more extensively in the twelfth chapter. The bulk of my comments will be reserved for that section.

A more firm grip upon eternal verity is promoted. Hearts are encouraged to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life. Heaven is made more clear, and earth is pushed into the background. Where these things are not, to some degree, taking place, the gathering is actually pointless.

There are no activities in the Kingdom that are unrelated to readying people to stand before God and receive an eternal inheritance.

There is a word declared in Joshua 14:8 that is appropriate here. Joshua compares the effect of the unbelieving spies on the people of Israel. *“Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the LORD my God.”* <sup>NKJV</sup> This is what unbelief does—it weakens those

**UNFULFILLED PURPOSE**

*“<sup>13</sup>Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.”* Grace had so

enveloped the heart of the apostle that he rarely thought of anything but fulfilling his ministry—at least that is what comes across in Scripture. In a day of divided interests and lukewarmness this is a strange occurrence. Actually, it was not all that common in the first century. But zeal is still the standard for the people of God because that was the manner of the Savior. Isaiah prophesied of the Lord Jesus, that He “was clad with zeal as a cloak” (Isa 59:17). When Jesus “dwelt among us,” upon beholding His manner, “His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” (John 2:17; Psa 69:9; 119:139). Now the Apostle declares how he has partaken of that Divine nature. Just as Jesus approached his ministry with zeal, so Paul entered into his ministry with zeal.

**IGNORANCE UNWANTED**

There are aspects to life in the Spirit that are public, and are not to be hidden. This contradicts the course of nature, which tends to make people more private in the intentions of their heart. Already Paul has stated his fervent desire to come to the brethren at Rome (1:10-11). But he does not want them to suppose this was but a casual intention, easily forgotten, or placed into the background of thought when the door was not immediately opened. Many an unstable soul has had noble desires, only to abandon them because they could not be fulfilled when they desired. I have often pondered what marvelous opportunities have been passed by only because individuals have not been willing to “wait upon the Lord,” thereby renewing their strength (Isa 40:31).

**PURPOSING**

Those who imagine that prayers are only to be offered once, or that intentions must not be valid if they cannot be fulfilled quickly, are simply wrong. Paul states he had “planned many times to come” to the brethren in Rome.<sup>NW</sup> He did not conclude that a failure to fulfill those plans indicated they were out of order.

I ought to point out, however, that Paul was sensitive enough to the Lord to recognize when his intentions were not in synch with the Divine agenda. Once, when they “tried to go into Bithynia” the Holy

Spirit “did not permit them” (Acts 16:7). We are not told precisely how the Spirit forbade them, but it is evident they were able to recognize His direction. But such was not the case with his intentions to go to Rome. That was a consistent desire of the apostle, and was neither rebuked nor forbidden by the Lord. I can only conclude, therefore, that Paul was in fellowship with the Savior in this desire.

Several years before Paul actually came to Rome, he expressed his deep desire to do so. After remaining in Asia for two full years, “Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome” (Acts 19:21). Around four years later, on a boat destined to be dashed to pieces in a storm, Jesus had appeared to Paul saying, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have

**There are aspects to life in the Spirit that are public, and are not to be hidden. This contradicts the course of nature, which tends to make people more private in the intentions of their heart.**

testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome” (Acts 23:11). It was not until over two years later that Paul finally arrived in Rome (Acts 28:16), a little over two years after he wrote this Epistle.

It seems to me that “purposing” is a vital part of our labors in the Lord. After all, our salvation is associated with Divine “purpose” (Eph 1:9,11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 John 3:9). It is certainly in order to set our minds and hearts on some honorable Kingdom work, and to be intent about it. In fact, there is a rich fellowship to be had with our Lord in determining to fulfill our ministry in the body of Christ.

Do you have something you have “purposed” to do for the Lord? Is there some honorable work you have longed to do, that will bring glory to the Lord and a sense of fulfillment in your ministry? Do

not abandon that purpose easily. Learn from our text to keep godly intentions, expressing them often in your prayers.

**HINDRANCE**

The most noble of intentions can meet with obstacles. Circumstance can raise, what seems to be, impenetrable walls between you and your desire. The phrase “let hitherto” means “hindered until now.”<sup>NKJV</sup> Later, Paul will say he had “been **much hindered from coming to**” the Romans (Rom 15:22). He does not say it was not yet time to come, but that he was hindered from coming. He does not say the Lord had told him not to come, but that he was hindered from coming.

The word “hindered” means prevented, forbidden, or withstood. Those who imagine their faith will invariably break down barriers instantly, need to examine this text carefully. We live in a spiritual environment where our intentions can be delayed, and even thwarted altogether. This is partially involved in “troubled on every side,” “perplexed,” “persecuted,” and “cast down” (2 Cor 4:7-9). While faith ultimately triumphs over these things, we are not to imagine they will not occur.

Once Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “Therefore we wanted to come to you; even I, Paul, time and again; but **Satan hindered us**” (1 Thess 2:18). However, even though “Hope deferred makes the heart sick,” yet when at last “the desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Prov 13:12).

Satan hinders in a number of ways. He has an allotted degree of power in nature. The fact that Paul was “shipwrecked” three times, and that a deadly serpent burst out of a bundle of sticks, fastening itself on Paul’s hand, were not mere happenstance (2 Cor 11:25; Acts 28:3). You may remember Satan’s assault against Job. It involved robbery, fire from heaven, a great wind from the wilderness, and sore boils from the sole of Job’s foot to the crown of his head (Job 1:15,16,17,19; 2:6-7). When the devil sifted Peter, he employed the questioning of some women (Matt 26:69-73).

There is a wide arsenal of weaponry that our adversary employs against us. He

certainly cannot operate independently of God, to Whom he is responsible. However, from time to time, he is granted leave to put us to the test, and he does so aggressively. From a higher vantage point, this is the proving our faith. In such tests the extent of our trust is revealed, and the firmness of our resolution proved.

So it was with the Apostle. Time and again he sought to go to Rome. His commission as an Apostle compelled him to do so. The nature of the Gospel urged him to remain firm in his resolve. And the good word about the faith of the brethren in Rome also encouraged him to maintain his cause. Satan was neither strong enough or wise enough to stifle that desire. Faith gained the victory for Paul. It will do the same for you!

#### Another Type of Delay

But there is one other aspect to Paul being hindered that should be considered. Some delay was the result of preaching in other areas. *"The Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia"* also needed to be tutored in the manner of the Kingdom, and thus Paul was sent there with Barnabas (Acts 15:22).

The Apostle zealously entered into his labors, all the while keeping his desire to go to Rome. He was willing to submit his will to the King, and wait for Jesus to use the key of David to open the appropriate door. He is a notable example for us all!

#### FRUIT

The longing of the Apostle was related to His Apostleship. He was not seeking mere friendship in the flesh. How poignantly he states the matter: *"that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles."* There was

more to Paul's calling than preaching—although that was at its heart. Results were also involved. I have often heard people say "we are not held responsible for results." There certainly is an element of truth in that saying, but it

The Lord Jesus declared that His Father would remove, or take away, "every branch" in Him that "beareth not fruit" (John 15:2). He further asserted that the glory of God and our status as disciples hinged upon fruitbearing. *"Herein is my*

**Fruitfulness is not an option— something that may or may not be possessed. Unfruitfulness, Jesus declared, is the result of the word of God being "choked," or suffocated by the cares of this world**

is too small to contain the whole of the matter. God has an intense interest in fruit, being glorified by it.

#### Fruitfulness Is Not an Option

Fruitfulness is not an option— something that may or may not be possessed. It is something provided for by Jesus, and earnestly sought by God. He is glorified by fruitfulness, and dishonored by a lack of it. Unfruitfulness, Jesus declared, is the result of the word of God being "choked," or suffocated by the cares of this world (Matt 13:22). It is a trait ascribed to "the works of darkness," and with which we are to have "no fellowship" (Eph 5:11). The people of God are to be reminded to maintain good works "that they be not unfruitful" (Tit 3:14). In His mercy, God has provided resources so that we will "neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:8). However, NO provision has been made for NOT being fruitful! It appears to me that this is almost unknown among many who profess the name of Christ. Fruitlessness is altogether too common in the churches.

*Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples"* (John 15:8). We are not, therefore, considering something that is inconsequential.

#### Fruit Among the Gentiles

While Paul's ministry was not limited to the Gentiles, they were the primary target of his labors. Now, he desired to "reap some harvest among"<sup>NRSV</sup> the Romans, as well as other Gentiles. The zeal with which he labored in the Lord's harvest is a singular phenomenon in Scripture. By his own confession, and in tribute to God's grace, he "labored more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor 15:10).

Even though the fruit was gathered for the Lord, yet Paul calls it his own. I assume this is because he really recognized no other work as worthy of his commitment than that to which the Lord had called him. He was a "laborer together with God" (1 Cor 3:9), and did his reaping in the name of the Lord. Too, as a good steward, he was garnering sheaves to give back to the Lord.

## THE GOSPEL DEBT

***"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."*** The power and effectiveness of faith can be seen in the perspectives and resolves it produces. Its superiority over a system of Law is thus seen. "The Law," the Spirit affirms, "is not of faith" (Gal 3:12). Consequently, it did not produce the kind of resoluteness

revealed in our text. People "under the Law" were thus described by God: *"Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men"* (Isa 29:13). They remained aloof from God, even though He had spoken to them, directed

them, and "hewed them by the Prophets" (Hos 6:5). But this is not the case with those brought into a covenantal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This verse (14) particularly confirms this to be true.

#### INDEBTEDNESS

To be a "debtor" is to be under

obligation. Further, the obligation is correct, offering no alternative but submission. The idea presented is that of one who has received something of great magnitude, and consequently is indebted.

It requires only a modicum of thought to see viewing oneself as a "debtor" is not a response of the flesh. Flesh perceives no indebtedness to God, and therefore neither honors nor serves Him. Further, its servitude to sin is not perceived as slavery, but as a willing and right preference.

The indebtedness of which the Apostle speaks is an explanation of his desire to have "fruit" among the believers in Rome (verse 13). That desire was not driven by a fleshly view of them, or mere professional interest. There were higher motives.

#### The Nature of the Gospel Message

The nature of the Gospel itself produces indebtedness among those receiving it. It is a proclamation for "every creature" (Mk 16:15). It offers a Divine resolution to a universal dilemma. The forgiveness (Eph 1:7), peace (Rom 5:1; 10:15), reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20), and justification (Acts 13:39) it announces are for "all men" (Rom 5:18). It announces a Savior that is for "all men" (1 Tim 4:10). That circumstance made Paul "a debtor."

#### The Nature of the Apostolic Office

The Apostolic office, by its very nature, involves serving the interests of another. The word "Apostle" means, *an ambassador of the Gospel, one commissioned by Christ, a messenger that is sent.*<sup>Strong's</sup> Such were sent by Jesus to preach and to bear fruit. As our Lord said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). That commission made Paul "a debtor."

#### The Condition and Nature of Man

The condition of man, created by the entrance of sin and death, requires the hearing of the Gospel. "All have sinned" (Rom 3:23; 5:12), and therefore require the Good News of salvation for sinners. It makes little difference whether sinners are refined or crude, cultured or barbaric, they are all in a condemned state. That

detail made Paul "a debtor," and he gladly accepted that status.

#### GREEKS AND BARBARIANS

The words "Greeks and barbarians" does not refer to where people lived, but to the language they spoke. "Greeks" were not people living in Greece, but people speaking the Greek language, which was

**Those who are most cultured and refined need the Gospel, as well as those who are more savage and barbaric. Sophistication and crudeness are only veneers, or surface distinctions.**

then the universal language. Under the reign of Alexander the Great, commencing in 336 B.C., Greek was promoted as the universal language. It was associated with culture and refinement.

When, therefore, Paul says he was debtor to the "Greeks and to the Barbarians," he means to the cultured and refined, as well as uncouth and uncivilized. Those who are most cultured and refined need the Gospel, as well as those who are more savage and barbaric. Sophistication and crudeness are only veneers, or surface distinctions. Beneath those distracting appearances, "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Therefore, whether on the barbaric island of Melita (Acts 28:1-2), or in the Areopagus, "in the midst of Mars Hill," surrounded by the most astute thinkers of the world (Acts 17:22, Paul was indebted to preach the Gospel.

#### WISE AND UNWISE

This is another way of looking at "Greeks and Barbarians." The first view is of their culture, or appearance. The second is of their attainment. The Greeks were noted for their worldly wisdom. They had a precise language, books, libraries, and a host of philosophers as well. The Barbarians did not have these things. Philosophers and writings did not come from their ranks. Yet, with the "wise,"

they were candidates for the Gospel.

Paul, seeing the true nature of the Gospel, and possessing the knowledge of God, preached the Gospel to those noted for thought, and to those not distinguished by their thinking. He knew the Gospel announced Divine provision for the learned and the unlearned.

#### A REMARKABLE GOSPEL

I have long marveled at the greatness of the Gospel of Christ. Over the years I have witnessed its transforming power in those who have believed it, embracing the Christ it proclaims. With joy I have witnessed people lacking formal training and disciplined thought become remarkably clear thinkers and articulate speakers. Without being soiled by the philosophies of men, I have seen them learn to read, speak, and reason upon the things of God. Their transformation was so thorough and effective, that those unacquainted with their past could not believe they were once "unlearned and ignorant."

I have also witnessed the most cultured and disciplined minds humbled by their acceptance of the Gospel. I have seen the learned become as fools, willing to abandon worldly wisdom in favor of the wisdom of God. Under the powerful influence of the Gospel, they came to depend upon God without any reliance whatsoever upon their natural abilities and powers. Their transformation was equally impressive, so that people no longer thought of them in regard to their fleshly attainments.

#### Scriptural Examples

We have examples in Scripture of men of disciplined thought being joined to those considered to be "unlearned and ignorant." Moses, for example, "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). Amos was "a gatherer of sycamore fruit" (Amos 7:14).

Daniel, in the king's court, was one in whom was found "an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas"<sup>NKJV</sup> (Dan 5:12). John the Baptist came from the wilderness, "clothed with

camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6).

Paul was a Pharisee, "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3; 23:6). Peter and John

Has there ever been a person who read the Gospel of John, First Second and Third John, and First and Second Peter, who concluded from those writings they were former fishermen? From the writings of Moses, would anyone conclude he had been raised in the house of Pharaoh, subjected to all of the wisdom of Egypt? Or, that

culture. The powerful influence of the Gospel and their affiliation with the Living God made them what they were! That is the nature of the Gospel. It elevates the lowly, and humbles the proud. It brings bread and water to all who thirst, regardless of their earthly pedigree. This single fact has had a profound impact upon my own spirit.

**The greatness of these men, and the effectiveness of their ministry, was not owing to their natural abilities or former culture. The powerful influence of the Gospel and their affiliation with the Living God made them what they were!**

was a fisherman, noted among the religiously elite for being "unlearned and ignorant" (Matt 4:18-23; Acts 4:13).

Who is the person who, after being acquainted with the words of Moses, Amos, John the Baptist, Paul, Peter, and John, will dare to decide from their words who was learned and who was unlearned? Which individual will venture to say who was educated and who was not, judging from the writings and words of these men?

Amos was a farmer, or John the Baptist someone living in the wilderness? Had we not been told Luke was a physician, would anyone have concluded that to be the case from the books of Acts and Luke, which he wrote? To ask these questions makes their answer very apparent.

The greatness of these men, and the effectiveness of their ministry, was not owing to their natural abilities or former

The Scripture establishes that outside of Christ, here are no real distinctions before God: "there is no difference." Also, fleshly distinctions are not recognized in Christ Jesus, who is the heart of the Gospel. In Him "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female" (Gal 3:28).

The awareness of these circumstances, among other things, made Paul a "debtor" to everyone. Each of us have good reason to thank the Lord this is true. Only grace makes real distinctions among men—and those relate exclusively to our ministries within the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28-29), and personal fellowship with Christ Jesus.

## DETERMINED TO PREACH

***"<sup>15</sup>So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."*** There is a remarkable amount of religious folklore that has been associated with preaching the Gospel. Some examples are, "No one should hear the Gospel twice until everyone has heard it once." "The Gospel is only preached to sinners, believers are taught." "You never preach to believers, only to unbelievers." All of these, and more, have been driven by an institutional agenda, and have not one syllable of support from the Word of God. This verse will confirm this to be the case, and that, as we may expect, with great power.

### AS MUCH AS IS IN ME IS

This is an extension of the thought expressed in the previous verse—that he is a debtor to all men. The word "So" is explanatory, as though he said, "That is why." Others versions read, "hence" <sup>NRSV</sup>, "That is why" <sup>NIV</sup>, "Thus" <sup>NASB</sup>. Because,

therefore, he is a "debtor," Paul now speaks of his determination.

While it may appear cumbersome, the expression "as much as in me is" has great meaning. Again, different translations unveil something of this meaning. "Hence, my eagerness" <sup>NRSV</sup>. "That is why I am so eager" <sup>NIV</sup>. "Thus, for my part, I am eager" <sup>NASB</sup>. "As far as it depends upon me" <sup>Darby</sup>.

In this expression we behold the yielded heart of the Apostle. No part of his real person stood against this resolve: "as much as in me is." He was not struggling with whether the resolve was right or not: "as much as in me is." Just as surely as he loved the Lord with all of his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, so he was fully devoted to the execution of God's will: "as much as in me is." He had been transformed by the renewing of his mind (Rom 12:2), and thus was eager to fulfill

his ministry: "as much as in me is."

This sort of resolution brings great glory to God. When the heart is settled and solid about doing the will of God, the Lord Jesus is honored. May there be more of this type of attitude among those who are serving the Lord.

### READINESS

The cry of faith is "I am ready!" Every place faith dominates, readiness is made known. Readiness means *forward in spirit, predisposed, and willing*. <sup>Strong's</sup> It includes the idea of willingness and eagerness—chomping at the bit, so to speak. It is more than simply being prepared, like a speaker being ready to make a speech. Readiness means the matter is dominating the mind and pulling at the heart. It involves thinking about the matter, and looking intently for the opening of the door of opportunity by the Lord of hosts. Distracting issues have

been settled, and any doubts resolved.

On one occasion, Paul expressed his preparation for both living and dying in these words, *"I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 21:13). Another example of Paul's readiness was expressed in relation to his imminent death. *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Tim 4:6). That is an excellent epitaph for every believer to seek.

Faith prepares us for the work of the Lord. It also produces the strong confidence required to enter into it with zeal. It was reliance upon the Lord that contributed mostly to Paul's readiness, not mere academic preparation.

**PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO BELIEVERS**

And what is it that Paul was eager, willing, and prepared to do? It was *"to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."* Mind you, they were already *"beloved of God"* and *"called to be saints"* (v 7). Their faith had been reported *"throughout the whole world,"* being held in high regard (v 8). Paul even looked forward to being encouraged by their faith

(v 12). There were a host of notable spiritual leaders among them (chapter 16). Yet, Paul is eager to come and *"preach the Gospel"* to them!

Let us forever put to rest any notion

Do not imagine the Gospel has no more relevance to those who have believed and obeyed it. They have only been introduced to the Gospel. The best of us have but entered the vestibule of the *"glorious Gospel of the blessed God"* (1 Tim 1:11).

**Let us forever put to rest any notion that a single member of the body of Christ has passed beyond the necessity of hearing the Gospel. The pit from which such a notion has been lifted was created by a restricted and lifeless view of the Gospel of Christ.**

that a single member of the body of Christ has passed beyond the necessity of hearing the Gospel. The pit from which such a notion has been lifted was created by a restricted and lifeless view of the Gospel of Christ. No less than sixty-five times, churches and believers are told of the Gospel (Rom 1:1,9,15,15; 10:15,16; 11:28; 15:16,19,20,29; 1 Cor 1:17; 4:15; 9:12,14,16,18; 15:1; 2 Cor 4:4; 8:18; 9:13; 10:14,16; 11:7; Gal 1:7,11; 2:5,7,14; 3:8; 4:13; Eph 1:13; 3:6; 6:15,19; Phil 1:5,7,12,17,27; 2:22; 4:3,15; Col 1:5,23; 1 Thess 2:2,4,8,9; 3:2; 2 Thess 1:8; 2 Tim 1:8,10; Phile 13; Heb 4:2). The centrality of these references are evident.

The Good News of Jesus is an exceeding large room, worthy of extensive and prolonged inquiry..

If there is one prevailing deficiency that exists in the modern church, it is its woeful ignorance of the Gospel. That unfamiliarity is the fountain from which unbelief, contention, and wayward conduct have come. Wherever the knowledge of the Gospel is lacking, so are all other matters relating to life and godliness. There is a great need in our time for powerful preachers of the Gospel—for men with insight and inner compulsion to open to the church what God has accomplished for them in Jesus. Refreshment and stability for the saints will result.

**CONCLUSION**

**A BRIEF SUMMATION**

The powerful interrelationships of Scriptural truth are evident in this passage. With an expertise that can only come from the Spirit of God, the Apostle has woven a beautiful tapestry. He has included God, Christ, and the Spirit. The Scripture, the Prophets, and the Gospel have been mentioned. Christ Jesus has been seen as the Master sending His servant, the Son of God, and the Seed of David. He is affirmed to have been declared to be the Son of God with power through His resurrection from the dead. Paul has presented himself as called by God, designated as an Apostle, and separated to declare the Gospel. He affirms he received grace and Apostleship for the purpose of producing among all nations obedience that comes from faith.

The brethren in Rome have been identified as the beloved of God and called to be saints. Grace and peace have been conferred upon them from both the Father and the Son. Thankfulness to God is expressed for the faith of the brethren in Rome, and that it is spoken of throughout the world. God is called to witness that Paul is serving the Lord with his spirit, and in the Gospel of His Son. Prayer to God is mentioned as the means used to obtain a prosperous journey to the brethren at Rome. The Apostle expresses a profound desire to bring some advantage to the saints in Rome, and to be encouraged by their faith. Because of his indebtedness to all men, Paul desires to have some fruit among those in Rome, greatly desiring to come and preach the Gospel to them. And that is just his

introduction!

**ONLY IN THE LORD**

Where can such remarkable versatility be found except in the Lord Jesus Christ? Where is it possible to develop such dexterity of thought, save in the power of the Holy Spirit? We have been wafted into higher realms, and prepared for heavenly tutelage. Great things will be brought to us in this most holy environment.

**FLESH EXCLUDED**

The total absence of any fleshly values should be apparent to every one. Absolutely no significance is placed upon mere human accomplishments or natural abilities. Rather, the Apostle is moved to bring us into the place where God is *"all in all"* (1 Cor 12:6; 15:28; Eph 1:23).

### MANNER AND CONTENT

It is true that God is *"is above all, and through all, and in you all"* (Eph 4:6). It is also true that *"all things are of God"* (2 Cor 5:18), and Jesus Christ is *"Lord of all"* (Acts 10:36). Both the manner and content of the Apostolic writings reflect these things with remarkable consistency. They never gave undue glory to man, or suggested there was such a thing as too much glory for God.

I realize these things are most evident to us when, in our hearts and minds, we are in the heavenly places. But these things are not apparent to every one wearing the name of Jesus. There is a remarkable amount of *Christianity* all around us that reasons after the manner of men, and ascribes glory to the flesh. It is enough to say that such things ought not to be.

### REAL PROFITABILITY

Real spiritual profitability is experienced by faith and in heavenly places. It is always true, *"the flesh profiteth nothing"* (John 6:63). This is *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"* (Rom 8:7). However men may choose to refine their natural abilities, it is still true, *"the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor 2:14).

These realities are why the Scriptures speak as they do. It is why they appear meaningless and unprofitable to those who are in the flesh. It is also why holy men of God never accommodated themselves to the flesh. Those spoke and

wrote with an acuteness awareness of the God to whom they were accountable, and the Gospel that had been entrusted into their care.

The book of Romans is a rich resource of spiritual insight. But we must be *"in the Spirit"* to receive it. The subjects addressed in it will be delivered from a lofty perspective. The faith of the Roman brethren demanded that this be the case—and ours does as well. If we will come to the truth in recognition of the poverty of nature and the power of the Spirit, we will soon be receiving the understanding and perspectives required to fight the good fight of faith. God is greatly to be praised for having supplied such an abundance of truth! He is, after all, a God that is *"abundant in goodness and in truth"* (Ex 34:6). Truly, there is, as the song says, "manna all around."

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 2/11/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 1:16-17: **"THE GOSPEL and LIVING BY FAITH."** The Gospel of Christ is given the priority in this text. It is the means through which men are saved—not merely saved initially, but from beginning to end. What is revealed through the Gospel is not well known in many groups of believers. In this lesson, it will become evident that more is in the Gospel that is ordinarily perceived. It will also be clear that it is indispensable. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God.

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