



SCRIPTURE STUDIES: ROMANS 1:8-15

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Romans 1:8-15 (ESV) – First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Last week, we looked at the introduction (V.1-7). Paul introduced us to himself (V.1), his gospel (V.2-4), and his ministry (V.5-7). Now, we’re getting into what is really an extension of that introduction (1:8-15). What we’re going to read in verses 8-15 is Paul’s desire to visit the church in Rome and his intentions when he arrives. His main desire is to share the gospel with them, which is what allows him to launch into an exposition of the gospel (V.16-17), which is the bulk of the whole letter. So, these introductory verses serve as a springboard into the rest of the epistle.

In 2019, I took a group of 9 people to the Philippines to visit a missionary our church supported. The purpose of our trip was twofold. One, I wanted to expose our people to a foreign land and allow them to see the gospel at work somewhere besides America. We visited a Filipino jail where I was able to preach. We went to their food centers and helped feed the poor. We put on a VBS at a school, worshipped at our missionary’s church, did street evangelism and much, much more. The second reason I wanted to take our people to the Philippines was because I wanted to encourage and build up the church there with our presence. This was something our people had a

tough time understanding. They wanted to be busy every second. But I tried to help them understand, just being here to support these people is doing more than any construction project could do. Why? Because you're building them up! One Filipino said to me, *"I can't believe you would leave the splendors of America to visit the Filipino."*

I say this because, in this section, we see Paul's desire to visit the church in order to build them up. He wants to encourage them. He desires to spend time in fellowship with them. He wants to preach to the church and have mutual spiritual encouragement in the gospel.

Scriptural Context

- **Romans 1:1-7.** Paul introduced us to himself (V.1), his gospel (V.2-4), and his ministry (V.5-7). V.8-15 is still considered the opening to Paul's letter, but he does begin to introduce his intent for writing (V.15-17).
- Greek style letters usually opened with an introduction (V.1-7) followed by thanksgiving to God for the recipients and prayer. Paul often conforms to this model (except with the Galatians; Paul was not happy with their defection).

Point #1-Paul is thankful for the church

Romans 1:8 (ESV) -- First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

- **Explanation.** To the Corinthians, Paul was thankful for the grace they'd received from God. For the Philippians, Paul thanked God for their partnership in the gospel. But for the Romans Paul thanks God because the faith of the Roman Church is being noticed throughout the whole known world. Paul is grateful because the gospel is spreading from Rome. And he's not grateful merely as an individual Christian. He's grateful as an apostle to the Gentiles who desires to see the gospel spread where Christ has not been named.
- **Faith is proclaimed...whole world.** Some churches are known because of its pastor, location, wealth or building size. The Roman church was famous because of its faith. Remember, Claudius expelled all ethnic Jews because of the clash they had with the church. So, the Roman church is making a name for itself and the gospel. The faith of the Roman Church was being made known and recognized in the whole known world (not literal, TJC is known throughout all

Wilson County). Paul may have felt the church at Rome had a unique responsibility to be a beacon of gospel light, given their status and location.

- **Application.** It inspires our faith when we see strong faith in other believers. Why? Because it shows us God at work in other ordinary believers who struggle through life just as we do.
- **Application.** We should be encouraged to see other churches do well. Paul was not in competition to see the churches he planted do better than ones he didn't. He wanted all faithful churches to flourish.
- **My God.** This is important. Because, as JM says, *"For Paul, God was not a theological abstraction but a beloved Savior and close friend."* He is my God. He belongs to me, and I belong to Him. To my daughter, I am her Father, and she is my daughter.
- **Through Jesus Christ.** Paul thanks God through Jesus Christ, our mediator, the one through whom we must approach God. *"There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"* (1 Tim. 2:5). Perhaps our prayers should begin, "Lord, I approach you now through your Son..."

Point #2-Paul wants to be with the church

Romans 1:9-10 (ESV) -- For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

- **Explanation.** Paul attests, before God, whom he serves with all sincerity in the ministry of the gospel, that he has been praying for the church at Rome, specifically that Paul himself will have the opportunity to visit them. He wants to be with the church. He desires fellowship with them.
- **God is my witness.** Paul invokes God as his witness that he indeed has been praying for the church and desires to be with him in person. Why did Paul feel the need to say this? Perhaps he was concerned that the Roman church felt neglected by the apostles. Paul wants to ensure them that he desires to visit them for their benefit.
- **Paul's service.** Paul says he serves God *"with my spirit in the gospel of his Son."* This service is always religious service in the NT. It's sometimes translated worship.
- **Paul's spirit.** In the NT, the human spirit and the Holy Spirit are both from the same word Pneuma. Context determines meaning. Here it seems clear that Paul is saying he serves God in his spirit. What does this mean? Paul serves God in

the ministry of the gospel with his whole being; he serves with all sincerity (c.f. Romans 12:1-2).

- **Paul's prayer life.** Paul was a man of prayer. He prayed without ceasing.
- **The gospel of His Son.** This recalls verse 1, *"The gospel of God."* The gospel is about God, but it is also the gospel that belongs to God. Here, it is the gospel that is about and belongs to God's Son. Jesus is the content and owner of the gospel message.
- **By God's will.** Paul desired to come to Rome for some time but was providentially hindered (c.f. V.13, 15:22). He had longed to come to Rome for many years (15:23, 32).
- **Application.** Why did Paul want to come to the church in Rome? He wanted fellowship with these believers. He wanted to strengthen them and be encouraged by them.

Point #3-Paul wants to encourage the church

Romans 1:11-12 (ESV) -- For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

- **Explanation.** Why does Paul desire to see the church? "For" introduces why. First, he longs to see them. Paul has never even met these people; yet, he longs for them. Second, he wants to impart spiritual gifts to strengthen the church. That is, he wants to experience mutual encouragement in the faith. He wants to encourage them, and Paul wants to be encouraged by them.
- **Paul's specific spiritual gift.** Paul's spiritual gift he desires to impart is not a general blessing, the gift of salvation or something from the list of spiritual gifts. He wants to encourage the church with an explanation of the gospel.
- **Paul desires to be built up.** Paul doesn't simply desire to build up the church, he wants to be built up himself by the church. The apostle to the Gentiles, one who has been appointed by Jesus Himself, desires for unnamed believers to encourage him in the faith.
- **Paul's humility.** This highlights Paul's humility. The greatest theologian, missionary, and pastor to ever live was also one of the humblest men to ever follow Jesus. Of this humility Calvin said, *"Note how modestly he expresses what he feels by not refusing to seek strengthening from inexperienced beginners. He means what he says, too, for there is none so void of gifts in the Church of Christ who cannot in some measure contribute to our spiritual*

progress. Ill will and pride, however, prevent our deriving such benefit from one another."

- **Application**

- When you go to church, seek to build others up. Too often we come to church self-seeking. "I didn't get much out of church today." But what did you give? Perhaps you would have received if you sought to give.
- Be humble enough to receive. Too often in our spiritual pride we say, I can gain nothing from him or her. They're too immature. Non-sense! If Paul can benefit from lowly believers, how much can we?

Point #4-Paul desires to bear fruit in the church

Romans 1:13-14 -- I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as the rest of the Gentiles.

- **Explanation.** We have already noted that Paul desired to visit Rome for quite some time but has been unable. He considers his hinderance the providence of God (V.10). He lists another reason he wants to come, and that is he desires to bear fruit among them.
- **I do not want to be unaware.** Paul often uses this phrase to highlight something important.
- **Brothers.** By this, Paul means brothers and sisters.
- **Intended to come but prevented.** Paul's inability to visit Rome led to the writing of this letter. In God's providence, Paul was hindered, which led to him composing this incredible epistle that has benefited the church in incalculable ways.
- **Reap some harvest.** What kind of harvest does Paul desire to reap? Perhaps their sanctification as the church grows in her understanding of Paul's gospel. But it's possible that he also has in mind winning more souls to Christ while he is there. He doesn't want to plant another church (15:23, 32), but he may wish to add to the church in Rome.
- **Paul's twofold focus.** Paul had two primary objectives. 1) Mature the church. 2) Win souls to Christ. In doing so, he desired to bear fruit for God. This should be our lives' focus. Jesus chose us to bear fruit in His name. *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain"* (John 15:16).

This interpretation is confirmed by his statements in verses 14-15.

#1-Bear fruit in salvation

Romans 1:14 -- *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.*

- **Explanation.** Why does Paul desire to bear fruit (V.13) and preach the gospel in Rome (V.15)? Because he feels an obligation to all men regardless of their status. Greeks were high echelon, Barbarians were lowly, uneducated citizens.
- **Obligation/Debtor.** It is the Greek word *opheiletes*, and it means debtor or one who owes. Paul is indebted to God, first, because God saved him. He's indebted to all men, secondly, because of the grace he's received in the gospel. He's under obligation to share saving grace of God. *"For necessity compels me. For woe is me I do not preach the gospel"* (1 Cor. 9:16).
- **Illustration.** Just as you would be under obligation to save a person in a fire or someone from drowning, Paul feels the obligation to the lost.
- **Personal application.** This verse has kept me in jail and recovery ministry. There have been times when I felt like quitting those ministries specifically, but I am in debt to these men. How dare I, after having received the grace of God to be set free from both, leave to serve myself.
- **Application.** Do you feel indebted to God? Do you feel indebted to all men?

#2-Bear fruit in sanctification

Romans 1:15 -- *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

- **Why did Paul want to preach the gospel in Rome?** In 15:20-21 Paul says his desire was to preach Christ where he had not been named. So, why is he eager to preach the gospel to the church in Rome? Because Paul's gospel preaching was not only for conversion but for building up and sanctification. Paul already said his goal was to bring about the obedience of the faith (V.5). This echoes the great commission. We are to make disciples and teach them everything Jesus commanded. Therefore, Paul's desire to preach the gospel in Rome was for discipleship. Wouldn't you love it if the apostle came here to preach the gospel message, even if you learned nothing new?

Overall, what we have in Paul is a great example of someone who built up the church of Christ.

How do you strengthen the church?

1. **Have a good attitude.** Look at how much Paul loves the church. He's thankful for the church. He wants to be with them and build them up. Have the battle in having a healthy church is being members who have good attitudes. If you have good doctrine and great service, but a bad attitude, you will be hurting your church.
2. **Pray for your church.** Paul never ceased to pray for the church. Often times, we pray for individual needs, and we should, but we should also pray for corporate needs (holiness, sound doctrine, spiritual growth, pastors and leaders etc.)
3. **Make Fellowship a Priority.** Paul longed to be with the church and to build them up. We need to make sure this is our priority too.
4. **Seek to build others up.** Don't only be a consumer. Be someone who actively seeks to build others up.
5. **Make the gospel central.** Paul's life, focus and mission was the gospel. Everything was about the gospel for him, the same must be true for us.