

## **Romans: Paul's Purpose to Preach**

**Romans 1:11-15**

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 1 as we continue to work our way through this great gospel. As Paul describes for us the very heart of the gospel and then expounds it in his letter to the Romans. Over the last couple of weeks, we've seen even in Paul's introductory words that they are filled with the gospel. Paul can't say hello without mentioning the gospel. And in seven verses, ninety-three words, he says hello. Basically, this letter is from me, Paul, to you, the Roman Christians. And yet in the context of that very word of introduction, he manages to stress the authority of the gospel. He characterizes the gospel as something that is rooted in the Old Testament, something that is focused on what God has done and especially on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the gospel is about something that God has done, not about something that we do. Ultimately, the gospel is about something that God has done outside of us that rescues us from the mess that we have gotten ourselves in. And so all the praise and the glory goes to God and not to ourselves. His focus on the gospel is that it is something that totally transforms us. It makes all the difference in the world. It impacts every aspect of our life. It changes the way we look at ourselves, it changes the way we see our purpose in life, it turns everything upside down and he does this just by way of greetings.

And then last week as we looked at verses 8 through 10, we saw a very short prayer report. Basically Paul is saying, let me tell you a little bit about how I pray for you and what I pray for when I pray for you. And in the context of that prayer report, he manages to mention to the Romans that he has so been interested in being with them that every time that he has prayed, since the time that he has been writing the letter or thinking about them, up until the time that he writes the letter, that he has been praying for them. He has been praying for them constantly. Every time he prays, he prays for them.

Having told them that, and in the verses we're going to see today, he elaborates on his specific reason why he so desires to come and see them. And his reasons revealed in these verses tell us not only a lot about the heart of Paul, but they serve as a mirror to our own hearts. They give us an opportunity to reflect and

say, "Has the grace of God changed us so that we think like that." How about serving the people of God. With that in mind, let's look at Paul's words, which are really God's words, in Romans, chapter 1, beginning in verse 11:

"For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even 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. Thus, for my part I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."

Amen and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Father, this is Your word, and we ask that by the Spirit today we would not only come to have a greater understanding of what Paul meant when he wrote these words, but that we by the Spirit would be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That we would look at the world differently; that we would look at the church differently; we would look at ourselves differently; but, more than that, that we would look at the Lord Jesus Christ differently because of what the spirit does in our hearts through the word. We ask this earnestly in Jesus' name, Amen.

Paul in these verses is going to elaborate on his reasons, which is really one reason, for coming to Rome. Later, by the way, in the book he's going to come back to this again. In Romans, chapter 15 in the verses around verse 24 he's going to talk again about what his agenda was in Rome. But he elaborates on this and in elaborating on why he wants to come to Rome he actually tells us a lot about what our attitudes ought to be to one another in the local church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what our attitude ought to be to those who are outside of the local church, those who are apart from Christ who aren't believers. And so I'd like to walk you through this passage today, and I'd like you to see four or five things.

### **I. Paul desires to establish the church by means of spiritual gifts.**

First of all, if you look at verse 11 you'll see Paul explain his desire to come to Rome and actually specify why it was that he wanted to come to Rome. He says, "I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you that you may be established." And so Paul just tells you point blank, my desire, brothers and sisters in Rome, my desire for coming to you is a desire to establish the church by means of spiritual gifts. And so Paul tells us a world just in that little sentence. First of all he tells us that he wants to come to serve the Romans. He's not there to exploit them. He's not there to get something out of them. He is there to give

them something. Paul's desire is to minister, to serve. He wants to impart something to them. When he looks at the church, he sees not a resource for his own personal gratification or for his own personal enrichment, he sees an opportunity for ministry. And by the way, if we looked at the local church that way it would change at least a few of us. It would change the way we look at the local church. Often times we look at the church as a resource for us. It provides this. It provides that. It provides the other. Paul doesn't look at the local church that way. He looks at the local church and he says hmmm, there's an opportunity to serve. There's an opportunity for me to minister, for me to give, not to get, but to give. And so he initially tells them look, the reason that I want to be in your midst is I want to serve you. I want to impart some spiritual gift that will establish you. Paul tells them specifically my purpose for ministering, my purpose for serving, my purpose for preaching is so that you will be established in the faith. In order for them to be established in the faith, he preaches the gospel. Isn't that interesting? Paul does not question that these believers are genuine believers. But he says for them to be established in the faith, you know what they need to hear? They need to hear the gospel. The gospel isn't something that we listen to at the beginning of our conversion experience, of our Christian experience, and then sort of set aside and move on to something more profound. The gospel is something that is actually to be infused throughout our Christian experience. We deepen in our understanding of the gospel. And as we deepen in our understanding and our embrace of the gospel, we deepen in our faith in trust of God. And as we grow and trust in understanding the gospel, so we also grow in trust of God. And so the apostle Paul says the way to establish you in your faith, Romans, is for me to preach the gospel. He gives us the book of Romans. We get a little taste of what he would have done had he been there in what he writes in this great book. He desires to be with them in order that they would be established in the faith.

Now, by the way, you see again even in this first verse that the way a person is established in the faith is dependent upon the work of the spirit. Notice what he says. "That I may impart some spiritual gift to you that you may be established." Establishing a believer in the faith is the work of the Holy Spirit by the means of the Holy Spirit. No human being has the power to establish you in the faith. Just like no human being has the power to convert you. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. And by the way, doesn't that show how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility goes together so beautifully and naturally in the thinking of the apostle Paul? Paul knows that he can't convert people. Paul knows that he can't even build them up in the faith. Paul knows that it takes spiritual gifts to do that. And yet Paul says, I'm eager to come do this. Now that's strange. The Spirit is the one who, through His gifting, establishes us in the faith. And yet Paul says, I'm eager to be with you in order that you might be established.

What's Paul thinking? Paul knows that the ultimate source of spiritual growth and spiritual life is the work of the Holy Spirit. But he also knows that faith comes by hearing. So it is the ministry of the word of God which is the instrument that the

Holy Spirit uses in the hearts of His people. And Paul sees no contradiction between those things at all. And so often people who are unfamiliar with Calvinist think well, you know you Calvinists, you believe in God's sovereignty. And that means that you kind of sit on your hands and let sinners take care of themselves. I mean if God's chosen them, they'll come to Christ on their own. There's no need for you to get involved. But that's a parody. It certainly is a parody of what Paul is teaching. Paul says it's the Spirit that brings growth, and that's why I'm so anxious to be in your midst ministering the word. Because Paul knows that the word is the Spirit's ordained choice for how He grows people in the faith. It's the Spirit's job to cause them to respond. It's the Spirit's job to cause them to grow; but it's our responsibility, and frankly, our privilege, to share that word of truth; to be amongst one another encouraging one another in the faith. And the Spirit will use that faithfulness. And so we see the coherence of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility even in the way Paul talks to the Romans in this little verse.

And we also see by the way that the purpose of spiritual gifts is to establish faith. You know in our day and age, the day and age of the charismatic movement, there is much controversy in the Christian church over the issue of spiritual gifts. But I want you to see one thing. Whatever gift, by the way, that Paul is talking about here, and he doesn't tell us whether he's thinking about an extraordinary gift or an ordinary gift. And there are good arguments for both. He just doesn't say. He says it's some spiritual gift that he wants to impart. Whatever that gift is or whatever those gifts are, the apostle Paul sees that the function of those gifts is to do what? To establish faith. So the gifts of the spirit are for the purpose of the fruit of the spirit. The whole purpose of the function of spiritual gifts is to produce spiritual fruit. That's the goal. That's the game. Not drawing attention to ourselves, not manifesting signs and wonders for their own sake, but in order that those who are in Christ will grow in faith.

And I want to ask you, friends, do you have the same kind of attitude to the church that the apostle Paul had? When Paul looks at the church, he has a desire to minister. He has a desire to edify. He has a desire to see brothers and sisters rooted and grounded in the faith and built up. Do we have that same desire to minister to one another? Paul's very words of description to the Roman church as to why he wants to come to them are actually an exhortation to us aren't they? We ought to have that same kind of attitude about one another. We ought to want to see one another built up in the faith. Do we have that kind of attitude? Do we have the mind of Paul which is really here the mind of Christ. Because it was Jesus who said I came not to be served, but to serve. And Paul is manifesting exactly that same attitude here.

## **II. Paul reminds us of the mutual encouragement that flows from selfless service.**

Now, having said all that, I'm not going to contradict myself in the next verse, but

it sure is going to sound like it. Look at the next verse. Paul goes on to say, "That is that I may be encouraged together with you while among you." Paul here is humbly acknowledging that if he goes to the Roman church with a desire to bless them, with a desire to build them up, with a desire to encourage them, with a desire to establish them, the strange and true reality of it is that he will be built up. He will be blessed, he will be encouraged. Paul is not just saying something nice so that the Romans will listen to him. Paul really means what he says. Paul is reminding us here that mutual encouragement always flows from selfless service in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The irony of Christian service is that when you die to yourself, you find life. When you give yourself away, you find yourself. When you put yourself last, you find yourself first. It's the irony, it's the dynamic of Christian service. When you devote yourself to serving others, you always receive more than you could ever give. And so I want to say as Christians approach the church and feel that the church is not ministering to them as it ought, you know the answer is not for the church to do more for you. The answer is for you to determine that you are going to give yourself away. That you are going to serve, that you are going to minister, to develop a strategy, an agenda, a mindset to minister to give yourself away.

And then in that context you will find that you are given more back than you have ever given. You know that applies to new church members. A lot of times new church members, especially new church members coming into a church this size, can feel like, boy, I'm lost. I'm overlooked. People don't see me. And they get frustrated. I know no better way to find a place than to give yourself away. As you minister in the context of the local church, you will find that more will give back than you give. And that's a reality that actually impacts every area of our Christian life, every relationship. It might even be a relationship between a husband and a wife. A wife feels neglected, a husband feels neglected. They feel like their spouse doesn't pay them the attention that they ought to pay them, doesn't love them the way they ought to love them. And if that spouse will say I am going to give myself away in selfless service, I promise that they will get back more than they give, not necessarily from their spouse. I don't know that God will change the situation. But I promise you this. God will give back to you more than you are personally capable of giving if you will devote yourself to giving yourself away for someone else. Paul says to the Romans, look, I know that I have something to give you, but you need to understand there are things that you are going to give back to me that I am going to be blessed by. This isn't a one-way transaction, even though I give to you and even though my desire is to come and give to you, I know that the mutual encouragement that you're going to give to me is something that I couldn't get anywhere else in the world. And we know that experience don't we? Haven't you been in experiences or situations where there has been someone, and they didn't know what you were going through, but they begin to share a story about how God helped them in a very difficult time. And suddenly you think, Lord, You sent that just for me. You sent that brother and sister who had gone through that just for me to encourage me. I had no idea that

anybody else in this congregation had gone through that. And there is someone who went through it, and you brought them through it, and you blessed them anyway. Or maybe it's someone's self-sacrificial service of you and suddenly you feel like, why are they giving me so much attention? I don't deserve that kind of attention, and yet they're giving me that kind of attention. And when you set out to bless, you'll always find there's a mutual encouragement in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Calvin once said, "There is no one so void of gifts in the church of Jesus Christ who cannot in some measure contribute to our spiritual progress." And here the apostle Paul, maybe the greatest mind and greatest preacher ever in the Christian church is saying to these Romans Christians, let me tell you, as I come to give to you one of the things that's going to happen is I'm going to be blessed by you, and our faith is going to be strengthened together as we fellowship. What an incredible thought, but it's true, and we know it don't we?

### **III. Paul is aiming for Gentile fruit among the Romans.**

And then Paul goes on to say in verse 13, that the reason he hasn't come is because he's been providentially hindered. You know, he opened up the epistle by saying look, I've been wanting to come, I've been praying to come for a long time to Rome, and some cynical wag in Rome might have said, well then, why haven't you come here before, Paul? And so Paul says in verse 13 says, look, the reason that I haven't come is not because I haven't wanted to, it's not because I haven't planned to. And later on he's going to tell you it's not even because I haven't tried. It's because I've been providentially hindered. It was not what God had planned. I have been stopped at every turn as I have desired to be with you. I've been prevented so far, he says. Paul, in passing, just in explaining why he hasn't gotten there, tells us something of great value though in verse 13. He says, his aim in coming to Rome was fruit from the Gentiles. Paul is aiming for fruit among the Gentiles. Look at the words that he uses in Romans 1:11-15 to talk about his goal. In verse 11 he talks about establishing them in the faith. He talks in verse 12 about encouraging them and being mutually encouraged with them in the faith. So he specifies being strengthened in the faith in verses 11 and 12.

Here he begins to talk about fruit. I'm looking for fruit among you. All of these are synonyms for what Paul's goals are. Paul wants to see people converted to Christ, and he wants to see Christians built up. In other words, his aim is evangelism and edification. He knows that Christian discipleship entails both. It means bringing those into fellowship with Christ that aren't in fellowship now. And as they are brought into fellowship with Christ, making them disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because you can't be a follower of Christ and not be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can't be saved by Christ and not be a disciple and so His work of edification is going to entail not only bringing people in the kingdom, but building them up in faith. And so Paul here says that's what I want. I want fruit

among the Gentiles. And by the way, even in that little phrase at the end of the sentence there in verse 13, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. Paul is telling you something about the Roman church. He's saying to us sort of parenthetically, you know, these people were predominantly Gentiles. Most of Paul's churches started with a Jewish core. He would go, he'd preach in a synagogue for three weeks. At the end of his three weeks of preaching on Saturday in the synagogue, he'd say now, anybody who wants to be in a small group bible study see me after the service. And he'd gather a little core group, and they would begin to meet in someone's home. And that group would build and build and build, and they would make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And they would become Jewish Christians, Jewish followers of the one true Messiah, and then they would start to reach out to the Gentiles in their area. That way Paul could at least assume that those Christians, those Jewish Christians, had some understanding of God's word. The Old Testament. And then he could work out to those who didn't have any understanding of God's Old Testament, the Gentiles in that particular community. And that was the way most of Paul's churches started. But these Christians are apparently predominantly Gentiles. And he speaks to them, I wanted to have fruit among you, just like among the other Gentiles. Because Paul especially had a mission to the Gentiles. We're going to see this Gentile nature of the church in the very next sentence as well. But I want you to see that Paul's goal is to see fruit among these Christians.

I want to ask you this. As you prepare to come to church on the Lord's day, as you prepare to come to church on Wednesday night or during the week, as you prepare to fellowship with other Christians who are part of this local church, is it a conscious thought in your mind, is it somewhere on your priority list of agendas that you desire to see fruit amongst them? Is that one of the things you think – you know, one of the things as I go to church today is not just that I want to get something out of the sermon or that I want to fellowship with my friends in Sunday School, but I'm going to church today with the agenda of blessing and encouraging a fellow Christian and seeing some fruit produced in their lives. Is that something that is on our chart? If our heart is Paul's heart, if our heart is Christ's heart, that's one of our hearts. That's one of our things in our hearts for one another. We are desirous of encouraging and establishing and seeing fruit produced in the lives of one another, determining to bless one another. Paul says when I think about you Roman Christians, I want to see fruit. That's the way we ought to think. We ought to think how can I encourage that brother? How can I encourage him to produce fruit in his work, in his family? How can I encourage that sister to produce fruit? Paul was looking to see fruit produced among these believers.

#### **IV. Paul, in light of his union with Christ/Christ's commission, is obligated to take the gospel to Greeks and non-Greeks.**

And then in verse 14 Paul stresses his obligation. And let me say verse 14 is a

little surprising. Paul says something that seems really strange. He says, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." Now Paul doesn't even pause and qualify that by saying I'm under obligation to Greeks and barbarians who are Christians. He doesn't say that. He just says blanket statement. "I'm under obligation to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and foolish." Now, in short, what the apostle Paul is saying is I am under obligation to everybody, but he is saying it in a really Gentile kind of way. I mean, if he was speaking to a predominantly Jewish Christian congregation, he would have said I'm under obligation to good Jewish people. That's not what he says here. He's speaking predominantly to a Gentile group, and so he says I'm under obligation to both Greeks, the cultured, and to non-Greeks, the barbarians, the ones who can't speak Greek right. That's where the word barbarian came from. It was a word, play on word, barbarous. And you can hear it: *barbarius*, they say. And he says I'm under obligation both to the Greeks and the non-Greeks, both to the wise and to foolish, to the cultured and the uncultured. I'm under obligation to everyone.

And you say, now wait a second. What had they given to Paul. Why is he a debtor to them? What have they given to him that he now owes something back to them? Well, we've slightly misunderstood, because Paul is not saying that the Greeks and the non-Greeks have given me something and therefore I am a debtor to them. I owe them something. He's saying something a little different. He's saying I am a debtor, I'm under obligation to everyone. All the Greeks and the non-Greeks, all the Gentiles. I'm under obligation to them because of my obligation to God. God did something for me, God did something in me, God commanded something to me, which puts me in obligation to everyone. God did something for me. He sent His Son to die in my place, and He redeemed me from my sin. God did something in me. He united me to His Son so that now my heart is His Son's heart. I want to think the way His Son thinks, I want to live the way His Son lives, I want to do the things His Son wanted do, and what did His Son want to do? The will of the Father. And what is the will of the Father? That all the nations will come and worship His Son. And so now I have the heart of His Son. I want to see the nations worshipping Jesus Christ, and furthermore, Jesus has told me to go to all the nations. In fact, He came and met me on the road to Damascus, and He said, "Paul don't kill Christians, make them."

And so the apostle Paul is saying look, I am under obligation, I'm under obligation to everyone. I want you to notice that Paul is not discouraged by that obligation at all. Paul feels no burden about that obligation. Paul isn't grudging about that. This is the most exciting thing that Paul could ever, ever think of that God has given him an obligation to share the gospel because Paul was a Christian killer. Paul had been murdering Christians, or at least aiding and abetting their murder. He had been doing his best to stamp out the church. And now God says Paul, here's your new obligation. Once upon a time, you hated Christians. Now you're going to love them. Once upon a time you tried to extinguish the church. Now you're going to expand it. Once upon a time you were



an enemy of Christ. Now you are going to become His apostle. And you know what? Paul was overwhelmed that God would give a sinner like him that kind of an obligation. Paul delighted in that obligation because of his union with Christ, because of Christ's atoning death, because of Christ's great commission. He is now obligated to go take the gospel to the Greeks and the non-Greeks. And I want you to see that juxtaposition.

It's strange because we don't think of duty and obligation in those terms. We hear *duty*, we hear *ought*, we hear *obligation*, and we immediately kind of cringe and say oo-oo-oo. That's kind of authoritarian, isn't it? There are a lot of people that will say, now when you become a Christian you don't have to do anything. It's just that you want to. You don't have to obey the commands, you just want to. That's wrong. Paul here says he's under obligation. Does a husband have to love his wife? Yes. I hope he wants to, but he has to. Does a parent have to love his child? Yes, I hope they want to, but they have to. You see obligations don't change when we become Christians. God's commands are still there, but our hearts do, and those obligations cease to be burdensome. Look at verse 15. He says he's eager to do this. He's obligated to do it. But he's eager to do it. I want you to see there's no fundamental antithesis, there's no contradiction between obligation and desire, obligation and eagerness to do it. Paul's willing, but it's a command. He has to, but he wants to. You know, it's kind of like a junior exec. He's sitting in his office, it's early afternoon, he's working on some accounts, he's really kind of bored by the work that he's working on. His boss comes down the hall, and he says, "Feenster, we've got a guy coming in who can offer us a \$5,000,000 contract, and I want you to do this. I want you to go out with Mr. A over there who is one of the senior partners in the firm. And I want you to head out to the country club, and I want you to play a round of golf with this guy." Now Feenster happens to love golf. And in fact, while he was diddling away there on that particular contract work, he was thinking about golf. Now is he happy about going out to play golf with a potential contract person? Yes, he's thrilled, he's willing. Does he have to? Oh yes, he does. His boss told him he was. He has to, but he wants to. Now look, that's a silly illustration, but all it shows you that have to and want to are not necessarily contradictory.

And in the Christian life we find that out. Some of you have been through things that you never would have chosen for yourself. You've been through situations in your family that you never, ever would have chosen for yourself. And yet God has been gracious to you and some of you who have been through those things have seen how those difficulties have been used in the life of another believer. Do you have to minister to those other believers? Yes, you do. But do you want to when God's grace has been sweetly ministered to you in a difficult situation? Think of the situation of childlessness. Who in the world would ask for childlessness upon themselves. And yet it may be that God, in His unspeakable grace, has born you through that particular struggle, and He has enabled you to be a blessing to another Christian couple for whom that struggle has just dawned upon their hearts. Do you have to minister to them as a brother and sister? Paul

says you do. Do you want to more than anything in the world? In the Christian life, it's not that there are no obligations, it's just that none of those obligations are burdensome, because our hearts have been transformed and Paul says look, I'm under obligation to everyone, and I love it. I'm eager to do it. Is that the way you approach your obligations to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### **V. Paul wants to preach the gospel for edification and evangelism.**

Look at verse 15. Paul goes on to say, "I'm eager to preach the gospel." He's showing his strong desire to edify, to seek converts in Rome. Is that the kind of spirit that we have about our Christian service to one another. Are we eager to edify one another. Are we eager to see people brought to Christ. My friends, it's one of the marks of a heart that has been found by the grace of God. That the law of God, the commands of God are not burdensome. In fact, they are the greatest privilege and delight that we could ever participate in.

Has God changed your heart in that way? Then let us devote ourselves to ministering to one another, to abandoning ourselves, and giving ourselves in selfless service and the commands of God are not burdensome. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, by the grace of Your Holy Spirit, work this kind of spirit of service in us; through Your gospel mercies we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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