

Romans: Our Concern, Desire, Purpose, and Fruit

Romans 15:22-29

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

November 25, 2012

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 15. We'll be looking at verses 22 to 29 today. Last Lord's Day Evening, we looked at Romans 13 verses 1 to 7 and thought about what the Christian response ought to be to the 2012 elections. Today and tonight we'll be looking at Romans 15 and 14, respectively. These three important passages we're going to study together before we begin the December series in, "An Ancient Christmas," looking at Christ and His coming from the Old Testament.

Well when you're looking at Romans 15 you're looking at a passage that addresses some of the heartbeat of Paul's philosophy or theology of ministry. For instance, if you'll allow your eyes to look at verses 14 to 21, you'll see Paul address what a healthy Christian looks like. He'll talk about the goal of sanctification in God's people, he'll talk about the only real ground for Christian boasting, he'll speak of the true source of successful ministry, and he'll even articulate his desire to take the Gospel to the unreached. You see that especially in verses 20 and 21. Well that forms the backdrop to the passage that we're going to be studying today. As we prepare to read and hear Romans 15 verses 22 to 29, I want you to be on the lookout for three or four things.

First of all, in this passage, Paul articulates his concern for evangelism and missions and especially to reach the unreached with the Gospel. Second, I want you to see how Paul emphasizes his purpose to serve fellow believers and his purpose for fellow believers to serve fellow believers. Then, I want you to see his concern for fellowship. There's a strong emphasis on the importance of Christian community and fellowshiping with brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ on a Gospel basis. And then finally, he talks about the fruit of blessedness in this passage and we'll talk about what that means when we come to the final two verses of the passage that we're going to read. Well let's pray before we ask God's help and blessing as we hear His Word.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the Word of God. We thank You that it is powerful and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword and that it discerns the deep things of our hearts. We pray that You would convict us and

encourage us, that You would instruct us and strengthen us from Your Word, that You would equip us for every good work, that You would enlighten us to our sin and show us our Savior, and build us up in grace, all by Your Word of God. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

This is God's Word. Hear it beginning in Romans 15 verse 22:

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

In this section of the book of Romans, Paul very much shares his heart with the Roman Christians and thus with you and me as well. And what we learn, not only gives us an insight into the heart of this great man, this pastor, this theologian, this missionary, this church planter, it also shows us what we ought to aspire to ourselves as believers. And I'd like to think with you about three or four things that Paul shares about his heart that ought to characterize our hearts as well. There are four things that Christians ought to emulate in Paul that we ought to aspire to.

THE PRIORITY MISSIONARY EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING

And the first thing that I want you to see is this. Look at verse 22. I want you to see the priority of missionary evangelism and church planting for the apostle Paul. Paul says, "This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you." Now you ask me, "Where in the world do you get the priority of missionary evangelism and church planting out of the verse?" Well you have to look back at verse 20 to understand verse 22. Verse 20 explains what Paul says there in verse 22. He says, in verse 20, "I make it my ambition to preach the Gospel not where Christ has already been named." In other words, he wants to go places where there aren't already churches and there aren't already Christians and he wants to share the Gospel with people that have never heard

the Gospel, who haven't named the name of Jesus Christ, who haven't had who Jesus is and what He has done for our salvation explained to them. He wants to do pioneer missionary work. He wants to do church planting in places where there are not churches. And Paul says, "That's why I haven't been able to come to you," in verse 22. "I've wanted to. I've wanted to fellowship with you dear Roman Christians. I was involved in planting your church many, many years before, I've ministered to your church, I have good friends in your congregation, I wish that I could be there with you, but I've been about this work of reaching unreached peoples. It's a priority for me."

And what I want to say to you is this. Every Christian ought to have an increasing concern for the missionary spread of the Gospel and the expansion and the establishment of the church. And Paul shows what a priority it was for him even though he would have loved to have had fellowship with those Roman Christians, it was such a priority for him to go and share the Gospel where it had not been shared, that he was committed to being there, though it kept him away from them for a long time. And what I want to ask you is simply this. Do you find that to be an aspiration of your own heart? Do you find yourself growing in an increasing concern that the Gospel go places where it has not yet gone and that people who have never heard the claims of Christ hear those claims proclaimed to them from the Scripture. There are billions of people on this planet that have not heard the Gospel Biblically and carefully and passionately explained to them in their own language. Do we have a concern that the Gospel will go and reach those who have been unreached with that Gospel? That was an aspiration of the apostle Paul and he showed that priority in the fact that he deprived himself from sweet fellowship that he would have enjoyed so that he could be out there in the fields himself sharing the Gospel. Do we have that same kind of aspiration? It's really one mark of a vital, vibrant, evangelical church that we have that kind of evangelistic concern and that we're ready to send our best and our brightest to do it.

You know, it's one thing to say, "Lord, call missionaries." But what if those missionaries are your children or your grandchildren or your dear friends who you've known for many, many years and you treasure those friendships? Would you pray for the Lord to raise them up and send them to the unreached with the Gospel, into dangerous places where they might lose their lives or experience persecution or other great difficulties? Well, one of the marks of a maturing heart of a believer is an increasing concern that the Gospel would go out and reach the unreached. And you see that, even in verse 22, when Paul says, "It's for this reason that I haven't come to visit you. It's not because I don't love you, it's not because I don't want to fellowship with you. I do." You're going to find out in the next few verses that he thinks about this a lot. He thinks about fellowshiping with the Romans. Why hasn't he been there? Because he's been doing pioneer missionary work, evangelism, and church planting. That ought to be a concern for all of us., not just the people that set the budge for evangelism and church planting and missionary work at First Pres., not just for the people that give to

that. All of us ought to be concerned and involved in that.

THE PRIORITY OF GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP

Secondly, I want you to see this. Look at verses 23 and 24. Look at the priority that Paul puts on Gospel fellowship. He says it several different ways. “Now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you” — in other words, Paul's been on their minds. He's wanted to come back and fellowship with the Romans. He goes on. Look at verse 24. “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.” Paul's already planning for another missionary activity to unreached people in Spain but he wants to go to Spain by way of Rome so that he can fellowship with them. So he's been thinking for many years about coming with them and he says he wants to see them. And then listen to the third thing that he says. “Once I have enjoyed your company, then you can help me on my way in my journey.” So in three different phrases, Paul holds up before us a picture of what's in his heart. He longs to fellowship with these Roman Christians.

Now I want you to think about how remarkable that is. Thirty years before this time, Paul, whose name then would have been Saul, would have had not the slightest interest in hanging out with Roman Gentiles. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees and he would have had both religious and racial prejudice against those Romans. And let me say, they would have had the same towards him. And now, because they both believe the Gospel, because they've both been changed, transformed, by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, because they've both experienced the new birth, these Roman Gentile Christians — there would have been Jewish Christians in the congregation too, but a predominately Gentile congregation — and this former Jewish Pharisee wanted to be with one another. And that's a picture of the Gospel, how the Gospel brings together people that, if you were just looking at the normal affinities and kinships of life, they would have had no desire to be with one another. But what brought them together? The Gospel did. Jesus did. And so they wanted to be together. And believers want to have that kind of Gospel based fellowship.

And this is what I want you to learn from verses 23 and 24. Every Christian ought to have a growing desire for Gospel fellowship with other Christ-worshipping, Gospel-loving, Bible-believing Christians, not just because you share the same background or the same affinity group, you pull for the same football team or you were a member of the same fraternity or sorority, or you grew up in the same neighborhood with one another, but the Gospel brings you together. That's why churches are made up of people who wouldn't be hanging out with one another if it weren't for Jesus and the Gospel. The very diversity of the background of believers in local churches is a witness to how the Gospel brings people together. People who would never fellowship with one another because they come from different backgrounds and walks of life come together around the

Gospel. And it shows the power of the Gospel, the reality of the Gospel, and Paul longs for that kind of fellowship with these Roman Christians and we ought to long for that same kind of Gospel-based fellowship as well.

THE PRIORITY OF TANGIBLY SERVING THE SAINTS

There's a third thing that I want you to see in this passage. Look with me, if you would, at verses 25 to 27. Here, Paul emphasizes the priority of tangibly serving the saints, and every Christian ought to have this priority. Paul says, "Why is it that I can't come to you right now, dear friends in Rome, fellow Christians in Rome, members of the believing church there in Rome? It's because I'm on my way to Jerusalem." Why is Paul on his way to Jerusalem? Because Gentile Christians all around Asia Minor and Greece, have been collecting money to send to believers who are in poverty back in Jerusalem. Now this problem is found in a number of places in the New Testament. If you remember in Acts chapter 6, one of the concerns for the Jerusalem congregation was widows who were impoverished and who needed to be cared for by the congregation there in Jerusalem. So the problem of poor believers in Jerusalem is a prevalent one in the New Testament.

But here's Paul saying that he wants these Gentile believers to help these Jewish believers. And he explains in a very interesting phrase why he wants them to do this. Look at verse 27. "If the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings" — who's he talking about? The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. "If the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings" — what are those spiritual blessings? Well, in Galatians chapter 3, Paul explains that the Gentiles who believe in Jesus are coheirs and coinheritors of the Abrahamic promises along with their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters in Christ. So he's saying, "If the Gentiles have come to share in the blessings that their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters have, then what? What does he go on to say? "They they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings." You know, if those, many of those Jewish Christians had been involved in Jerusalem and especially in Antioch in doing what? Sending out missionaries to go share the Gospel with Gentiles. Now those Gentiles have come to faith in Christ and what should they do? They should then serve their brothers and sisters who are in need back in Jerusalem.

What does Paul want? He wants all parts of the church serving one another. He wants us looking out for one another. You know, Paul could have used this occasion to pull the church apart. He could have said, "You know, there are a lot of people in Jerusalem who really didn't want me to come to you on a missionary trip. There are a lot of people in Jerusalem who didn't think we ought to take the Gospel to the Gentiles." And would that have promoted unity between the church in Jerusalem and the church in Rome? No, it wouldn't. But what does Paul say? Paul says, "We were sent out by them and you got to share in their blessings

because they sent us out with the Gospel. Now, they are facing poverty and oppression and you have the privilege of serving them now by taking by this offering to Jerusalem to relieve them in their time of need.” Isn't it interesting?

It's a sweet obligation, by the way. Look at verse 27 how he says it. “They were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them.” Don't you love the way that both sides of that are emphasized? They owe it to them and they were pleased to do it. Paul uses this idea of being a debtor or under obligation or owing the Gospel to the Gentiles of himself and he speaks of this idea of our indebtedness to one another on a number of occasions. Once, earlier in Romans in Romans chapter 1 verse 14, he mentions it in his letter to the Corinthians, he mentions it in the letter to the Galatians — it's an idea that pops up in the apostle Paul. But isn't it interesting how he says it? The Gentile believers are under obligation to help their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters back in Jerusalem. He says they owe it to them. But did they view it as a burdensome, onerous obligation? “Awe, do I have to do that?” No, it pleased them to do so, Paul says! They wanted to do it! They wanted to help their brothers and sisters in Christ back in Jerusalem.

Can you imagine how that would have helped the unity of the church in Paul's day? You know, with the controversy going on of what the proper relationship was going to be between Gentile Christians and the ceremonial law and what the fellowship in the church was going to be between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians? Can you imagine how it would have helped the unity of the church for the Gentile Christians to know that Jewish Christians had sent them missionaries and for the Jewish Christians to know that Gentile Christians had sent them poverty relief in their time of need? And Paul wants to foster that kind of unity in the church. He wants us to serve one another. And that again is an aspiration that we ought to have — a longing to serve one another, to serve one another within the congregation and to serve brothers and sisters in Christ elsewhere. That's the third thing that I want you to see.

“THE FULLNESS OF THE BLESSING OF CHRIST”

The fourth thing is this. Look in the final two verses of the passage, verses 28 and 29, because here Paul talks about the fruit of blessing that comes from this gift that the Gentiles have given to the Jewish Christians. “When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.” Now that's one of those phrases — don't you very often come across phrases in the New Testament that you could just meditate on them for hours and hours and days? “The fullness of the blessing of Christ” — what a beautiful phrase. I don't know all that Paul means by that phrase, but I think that at the very least Paul is saying this. He's saying, “Roman Christians, when you see me the next time I will have delivered that gift of the collection to the impoverished believers in Jerusalem, and so when you see me

next, you will see me, you will see the shine on my face from having received the blessing that our Savior talked about.” You remember what Paul quotes elsewhere? What did our Savior say? “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And Paul is saying, “When you see me next, you are going to see a man who has enjoyed the fullness of the blessing of Christ because I will have been able to take a gift from Gentiles, many of whom themselves are experiencing persecution and difficulty, and they have given to their brothers and sisters back in Jerusalem, and I'm going to be a part of that giving and it's going to bring a blessing. I'm coming to you in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.”

You know, our forebears were so concerned to give thanks to God that hundreds of years ago they started observing Thanksgiving Day. Now that Thanksgiving Day has been normalized close to our lifetime — a little before my lifetime but in the lifetime of many of you on the Thursday that we call Thanksgiving in November. And it is a supreme irony to me in our culture that this day that our forebears established to give thanks to God for all the bountiful blessings that He's poured out on us is followed by the day which is the paragon of consumerism in our culture. So we give thanks to God on one day for all the stuff that He's given us and then on the next day we go out to acquire more stuff. And Black Friday is now easing its way back onto Thanksgiving Day. Target was open at nine o'clock on Thanksgiving evening. I hope none of you were in the lines there waiting to get in. But isn't that an interesting thing? And to me, it is a picture of a materialistic consumer culture. Our culture defines ourselves by consumption. We view ourselves fundamentally as consumers. We are consumers of goods and products and services.

Well here's Paul saying, “Not Christians. We believe it's more blessed to give than to receive.” And so we know that the fullness of the blessing of Christ comes not when we're taking but when we're giving. Our giving is what fundamentally defines us. And what a glorious passage this is for us as believers to remind ourselves, “Oh yes, even though my culture is telling me twenty-four seven that what I am fundamentally is I'm a consumer, that's not who I am. I'm a Christian and I'm very thankful for the bountiful gifts that God has given me. And I know that there are things that I have to consume and I'm very thankful for free markets and I'm very thankful for the country and for the abundance in which we live, but I'm not going to let myself fundamentally be defined by that. I am a giver and it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Well the apostle Paul in this beautiful passage is showing us so many things that ought to be aspirations of our hearts. We ought to aspire to see the Gospel reach the unreached. That ought to be a concern for every growing Christian in this room. And we ought to be engaged in that ourselves. We ought to have a concern for Christian fellowship, a purpose to serve one another, and then an understanding that real blessedness comes not in taking and receiving but in giving. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word and we ask that You would bless it to our everlasting good and to Your glory, in Jesus' name, amen.

Would you take your hymnals and turn with me to number 141 and we'll sing, "God In the Gospel Of His Son"?

We don't have to be caught up in what the world tells us consists blessing because God has given us what we really need — the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).