

Romans 1:8-15

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[0:00] Beloved, we have so much to be thankful for. Simply those things that our finite minds tend to label good, if we are attentive, could fill our days with thanksgiving.

If it really stopped to really think about all the things that are easy to define as good. We have limitless things to thank the Lord for.

And Paul is going to go on and tell us in Romans chapter 8 and verse 28 that we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

And so he broadens our horizon, not just to those things that are easy to call good, but to everything that happens in our lives. It is good. Paul models thanksgiving for us here in verse 8. And Paul exhorts in his writing again and again that we should be thankful. One example. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 16 through 18, he says, Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

[1:28] That you would rejoice always, that you would pray without ceasing, and that you would give thanks in all circumstances. It is God's will for you in Christ.

However you might feel today, I want to invite you to take a moment to be thankful. Just a quiet moment to thank God for the salvation of your soul.

If in fact you are found in him this morning. I believe that often we forget how undeserving we are of the grace of our God to us in Christ.

We forget to be thankful for the very salvation of our souls. This is a mine that could be mine forever, and it will be.

Thanksgiving for our salvation. Take a moment this morning to thank God for your life. Everyone here at the present moment is alive.

[2:32] Glad for that. You have great opportunity this day to see, to savor, and to glorify your God. Might take a quiet moment to thank God for your family and the blessing they are, even when they're not easy on a Sunday morning.

And perhaps like Paul, to thank God for the church. Those that he's saved along with you, that he means to be such a grace to you.

We have so much to be thankful for. I pray that it becomes the impulse of your heart and mine to begin.

First, I thank my God through Christ Jesus for. And that we would spend our lives completing that sentence.

The theologian William Law once wrote. Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays the most or fasts the most.

[3:38] It is not he who lives the most. But it is he who is always thankful to God. Who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness. And has a heart always ready to praise God for it.

Oh, I wonder how many things pass through my life that I fail to praise my God for. However, I'm sure that my life is replete with neglected opportunity for thankfulness and praise.

Let's notice, secondly, Paul's obedience. Look at a bit more text for this. Verses 9 and 10 and then 13 through 15.

Before I read that again, just like to say, oh, that we would be obedient like Paul. You see, Paul has a desire.

And as I'll show you in a bit, it is a God given desire. But he is willing to submit in all things to the sovereign purpose of God.

[4:47] So again, verse 9 and 10, he says, for God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit and the gospel of his son. That without ceasing, I mention you always in my prayers.

And he gives us the specific asking that somehow by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you. He wants to be with them.

And he tells us for what purpose he wants to do this. Verse 13 and following. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I've 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. He's talking about saving faith there. He says, 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. Paul is driven to see them, to minister to them, to see Romans come to faith in Christ.

[5:58] It's all wonderfully good things that he desires to do. All of these desires are of the Lord. And yet Paul recognizes the restraining hand of God in preventing his coming.

Look back at verse 10. He says, in his prayers, he asked that somehow by God's will, he may succeed in coming to those Roman believers.

He recognizes that God has not yet willed it, that he would be there. Why? Because he's not there. Clearly it hasn't happened. And therefore it hasn't been God's will that it would happen.

See, Paul only wants what the Lord wants. He is confident that should God intend him to go, that he will at last succeed in coming to them.

Many of us wonder what God's will is for our lives and spend much time fretting about it. This happens very often in life transitions.

[7:05] Right, college students? Paul desires to go. He prays that he might and he submits himself to God's will. I think that we would likely be wringing our hands.

Oh, to go to Rome or to not go to Rome, what am I to do? We've spent all of our time preoccupied with the question. Asking others what they think we ought to do.

Thinking constantly about it. But listen to what Paul says later in this letter about knowing the will of God. This is Romans chapter 12.

The very beginning, just after he has finished his systematic theological portion of this letter. When he turns his attention after a beautiful doxology to practically apply all that he's taught so far.

He says this. This is verse 1 and 2 of Romans 12. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

[8:16] That is, submit your whole self to him. Utter submission. Utter obedience. Recall Paul in verse 1 calls himself a servant of Christ, Jesus.

He goes on in verse 1, chapter 12. Holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

That by testing you may discern what is the will of God. What is good and acceptable and perfect. Our minds are renewed by what?

Now, he tells us this in Romans chapter 8. As he talks about the things of the Spirit and the word of Christ. Our minds are renewed by the word of God.

So train yourself and be trained in the word. If you desire to be submissive to Christ. Read it. Memorize it. Meditate upon it. Apply it obediently to every facet of your life.

[9:30] If you, by grace, are obedient in increasing measure to all that the Bible commands. Then you need not worry about the particular what and who and when.

Because you will find yourself discerning what is the will of God. What is good and acceptable and perfect.

Don't become distracted by trying to sort out the details. So that you neglect the very clear commands that God has already given to you. Donald Barnhouse once wrote, this is on your bulletin if you care to reference it.

It says, the score of God's plan is set forth in the Bible. In the measure that I learn it, submit myself to it, and seek to live in accordance with all that is therein set forth.

I shall find myself in joy and in harmony with God and his plans. So in any circumstance, with Paul's good impulse to want to go, Paul was willing to submit himself to the restraining hand of God at this point in his life.

[10:42] So that was Paul's obedience. Notice thirdly, Paul's longing. See this at the very beginning of verse 11.

A significant marker of a mature Christian is his or her love for the church.

Note that Paul is longing to see these people, to know and to be in fellowship with them. This is not his local church.

This is not the people he knows best, but they are those saved by God in Christ. And therefore, he also loves them.

John writes in 1 John chapter 4, verse 19 and 20. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

[11:49] For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. Show me a person who claims to follow Christ that does not love the church.

And I will show you a person who most likely is not a Christ follower. If you love Jesus, then you will love the church, even with all her imperfections.

In Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, Paul says that Jesus obtained the church with his own blood. You don't have to love the church's imperfections.

In fact, you shouldn't. But you have to love her. You have to desire holiness for her and long to be with her that you might serve her.

That you might help to build up this thing that Jesus shed his own blood for. We'll see further in a moment. That's the very drive for Paul's longing.

[12:53] What is it that he longs to do? We'll note here in just a bit. He wants to see the church built up for the glory of God. I fear that too many Christians these days attend a church, perhaps call themselves part of a church for what they might get out of it.

They might particularly like the singing or the teaching. It checks particular boxes for them. They aren't really willing to participate in the life of the church.

They're not really willing to get in the mix and to help it grow in holiness. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 1 and following to a people who were eager for gifting and expressions of gifting and being known for that.

He has a lot to say about love. What ought to drive the impulse for any service to the church ought not be pride, but love.

You may be familiar with some of this, not just a marriage text. Beginning in verse 1, he says, If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

[14:13] And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

And I think he's exaggerating intentionally. I think he's saying, you can't do any of these things.

You're not going to be this people. But if you even think you can, if you can obtain to this, but you have not love, you're noisy, you're nothing, and you gain nothing.

And he goes on. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast.

It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful.

It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[15:28] Beloved, we would do well to emulate Paul's longing to be with this church, to love this church, and to impart something to it for its benefit.

So in thinking about that into the rest of verse 11 and on to verse 12, notice Paul's humility. Notice his humility.

He says that he longs to be with them, to see them, 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.

Now, from my perspective, if anyone had a reason to boast, it was Paul. But he does not. I feel as if Paul didn't need to write verse 12, but he does.

In verse 1, I mentioned previously, he expressed the humility of referring to himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. And here he recognizes the opportunity for mutual encouragement.

[16:39] This Paul, Paul the apostle, right, sees the opportunity for them to also encourage him. In the modern discipling model, you'll often hear things like, everyone needs a Paul and everyone needs a Timothy.

In fact, I'm pretty sure I have said something to this effect in the past. And the sentiment is good, right? Find someone who can invest in you and find someone that you can invest in.

This kind of assumes some sort of spiritual ranking, doesn't it? Like we just move in degree and every part of our maturity just levels up.

And we keep on doing that. Areas of our life do grow and we do get stronger and we do improve.

But it's prideful for us to think that we've reached a level where everybody then is below and we invest in them and we have to find that super Christian to invest into us.

And it kind of becomes a tragic pyramid scheme. Paul longs to see these Christians because he knows the Lord will use him to strengthen them in the faith.

[17:52] Isn't that astounding? Verse 12. May impart some spiritual gift to strengthen you.

Verse 12. That is, he clarifies that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

You see, beloved, humility is a prerequisite for growth in faith. And healthy humility yields increased faith. When we realize that we are not the source of all that is necessary for life and godliness, and we are not.

We have nowhere to run except to the one who is the source of life and godliness. What a beautiful thing it is when God's people walk in humility with one another.

Seeing each other as a grace given by our God for the increase of our faith. And laboring, working to bring about that in others as well.

[19:00] That we might be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. Both yours and mine. Church is a beautiful community project of faith.

Progressing together. Growing in holiness together to the praise of our God. Paul expresses this very idea in Ephesians chapter 4.

It's one of my favorite church texts. So you spend much time with me. I will reference it once again.

Here in chapter 4, Paul talks about Jesus ascending and descending and giving gifts to men.

And he lists those beginning in verse 11. Where he says, and he gave the apostles, the prophets. Which I will argue just for two seconds. I think he's referring to the Bible there.

I think he's referring to the writing of the Old Testament and the writing of the New Testament. Then he says, besides the point. Then he says, the evangelists and the shepherd teachers. Why?

[20:02] Why did he give these gifts to the church? To equip the saints for the work of ministry. This is verse 12. And here's the work of ministry. For building up the body of Christ.

So catch what he's saying there. Here's that mutual encouragement of faith. All of us working together to build up the body of Christ. Verse 13.

He says it has a goal. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. To mature manhood. To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

So that we may no longer be children. Tossed to and fro by the waves. And carried about by every wind of doctrine. By human cunning. By craftiness.

In deceitful schemes. Rather. Speaking the truth. In love. We are to grow up in every way. Into him who is the head.

[21:01] Into Christ. From whom the whole body. Joined and held together. By every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly.

Makes the body grow. So that it builds itself up. In love. Isn't that beautiful? Each part. Every part. Necessary.

Right? Not ranked in spiritual order. But necessary. And working properly. When the body is doing this. We speak the truth in love to one another. We encourage each other.

In the scripture. To grow up into Christ likeness. For the praise. Of our great God. And beloved. All of that. Starts with humility. All of that begins.

Believing. That others can invest. Into you. And be used as a grace. By our God. To grow you. In the faith. Paul. Paul thinks that.

[21:56] Surely we should think. That. So we see. In this text. As Paul expresses his desire. He's writing them to say.

I've longed to come to you. I've been prevented from coming to you. I hope someday. I'll get to come to you. These character qualities. In him. These dispositions. As he writes.

These verses. This text. Paul expresses. His thankfulness. His obedience. His longing. And his humility.

Let's pray together. For the grace. To emulate. These qualities. To be with us.