

After Paul gives his introductory greeting, he begins in the same way many of his letters begin, with thanksgiving for those to whom he is writing the letter. ⁸ *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.*

Romans 1:8 (ESV) He expressed the same gratitude and prayer for the Corinthians (1Corinthians 1:4), the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:15), the Philippians (Philippians 1:3), the Colossians (Colossians 1:3-4) and Timothy (2Timothy 1:3). When something is repeated in the Scriptures, we know we should take special note of it.

Paul loved the family of God. He loved and prayed for the believers whose testimonies were so powerful that people wanted to tell them when they traveled to other cities. They may have reported something like this: "Did you hear about the faith of so and so? They were asked by soldiers to say that Caesar is lord and they boldly declared that Jesus alone is Lord, and the soldiers just slapped and spit on them and walked away! And brother so and so was so bold that he prayed for them as they were leaving that they would find the joy of knowing Jesus as Lord too." That is how I imagine it spreading. I could share the stories of the early martyrs and how they stood firm in the face of death. That would certainly be something that even unbelievers would spread from town to town.

They may have shared how these Christians would search for abandoned babies each morning, even with boats under bridges to dive in and rescue babies that were thrown in the river to drown. I'm sure there were probably stories of circulated of how they would risk their own lives to care for the sick during times of plagues (1Peter 2:12).

It happens today too, though we'd love to see it happen with more frequency. A teacher at Briarwood Elementary School put her students in the bathrooms, told them she loved them and told them to pray. After the tornado went over, the only thing left standing of that whole school was those bathrooms. She told the reporter that they were calm. He asked why that was. She replied, "I think they had faith!"

A Plaza Tower School teacher told a TV network that she relied on her faith to help bring comfort to the children during tremendous chaos. Rhonda Crosswhite said, "I did the teacher thing that we're probably not supposed to do, I prayed. And I prayed out loud, 'God please take care of my kids.'" The world has heard about her faith. They can outlaw prayer in school, but they can't stop it! As long as there are tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, gunmen, and even periodic tests, there will be prayer in schools!

Commented [notes1]: 1 Corinthians 1:4 (ESV)

⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,

Commented [notes2]: Ephesians 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,

Commented [notes3]: Philippians 1:3 (ESV)

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,

Commented [notes4]: Colossians 1:3-4 (ESV)

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

Commented [notes5]: 2 Timothy 1:3 (ESV)

³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

Commented [notes6]: 1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

I've shared the testimony of the Imam that was born again in a closed country and the power of the living martyr that forgave him from his hospital bed. We've heard how that Imam is now witnessing to other Imams. We could go on and on of the stories of faith we've heard this year. **Do you love those brothers and sisters in Christ?** Paul did. He knew they shared the same love of Jesus and the same hope in the gospel. He would pray for them because he cared about them. Do you pray for them?

As followers of the Lord Jesus and members of the body of Christ, we should have a love for our fellow believers (Romans 12:10). We should be lifting them up in prayer. I'm proud of the way this church cares about others, but we can grow in this grace even more. Our genuine love and concern for the body of Christ, for those whose testimonies we hear, for those on the prayer chain, for one another can be a testimony that is heard in other parts of the world. Love one another as Christ loves us. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2); John 15:12)!

⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. Romans 1:9-10 (ESV) Paul calls God as his witness that he continually prays for them. When Paul tells us to pray without ceasing, he practices what he preaches (1Thessalonians 5:17). He prays because his spirit is in service to the gospel of Jesus. His spirit is praying for the advancement of the good news of salvation and for the strengthening of the believers. He prayed that he might be able to come to them and personally minister to them.

Paul had a great vision. He wanted the world to know the good news of Jesus. That would only happen if the new believers were established in the faith, stayed strong, and became living witnesses of the power of God to transform a life from selfishness to love. Yes, he loves the individuals and cares about each for whom he is praying. That is a big burden. He also cares about each group of believers in each city, for they need to stay united to be spiritually healthy. He also has a vision for the church to grow and multiply. Our sign out front last week said that **Satan subtracts and divides but God adds and multiplies.** Paul wanted to see the world have the opportunity to know what he called in the first verse, the good news of God. The best way he knew to do that was to pray for fellow believers and to preach the Word. (Ephesians 6:18)

Paul had studied the Law and always looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. When He did come, Paul didn't recognize Him. How could Almighty God be so humble, love the sinners, and die a cursed death? Then when he met the glorified Jesus on the way to Damascus, he had to reassess his interpretation of Scripture. The revelation was so overwhelming, the truth so clear, so wonderful, so filled with grace and love, that He was compelled to give every waking hour till the day he was beheaded so that others might see what was revealed to him. The world had to know, and Paul saw prayer and preaching the Word as the way to bring it about. Nothing has changed. Strengthening

Commented [notes7]: Romans 12:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Commented [notes8]: Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Commented [notes9]: John 15:12 (ESV)

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Commented [notes10]: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ pray without ceasing,

Commented [notes11]: Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

the believers to demonstrate the transformed life in the midst of a sin sick world and preaching the wonder of the grace of God given to us in Jesus is God's plan. Do you share Paul's motivation? If you do, you too will love and pray for those whose testimonies you hear.

Some of you will remember Michael Griffith. Our dear sister Cindy witnessed to him. He came from a nominal Christian faith, mixed with a bunch of New Age and worldly ideas, along with a ton of baggage. He worshipped with us as he began to be transformed. He moved to Phoenix where the Spirit of God worked him over removing layer after layer of the old and restoring the person who God originally intended him to be. He came by the office to let me know how far he had come. He is on his way to Africa to help at-risk-mothers in Kenya. Wow! Transformation! You are hearing about his faith. Pray for him and his new wife Ruth and their ministry in Africa.

The church in the USA has fallen short in this area of love for the family of God. I can personally testify that this is one thing that cults use to attract the hungry souls. Satan sees the lack of love in the body of Christ, the individualism and protection of one's space and time, the unwillingness to be involved in others' lives, and he imitates real love. Then nominal Christians or new believers are drawn to it because they instinctively recognize it as something that is missing in their life (1Peter 1:22). What a shame that cults can practice this brotherly caring better than the church! Let us not let that happen here, Amen? I'm not talking of enabling people but truly giving of yourself to genuine needs (1Thessalonians 2:8-9).

¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you - ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. Romans 1:11-12 (ESV) This is on the list of my favorite verses. Here's why. Here is the great Apostle Paul, a student of rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), a man who had been specially called by Jesus, who also received visions and revelations (2Corinthians 12:1), who planted churches, healed the sick, even rose from death after being stoned (Acts 14:19-20). He is telling these Gentile believers, that he wants to bless them but knows that he will be blessed by them too. Do you see what I'm getting at? He knows that the Spirit of God in him and in them is what makes the Christian life possible. The newest believer might have something to share with an old saint that has lived an incredible life of study and service.

You sure don't hear enough of that today! Instead it's, "Come hear so and so, the man with a special gift of this or that and you will be blessed." Do they ever say he wants to be blessed by you? Is there ever hint at mutual encouragement? When real believers gather there is mutual encouragement (Philippians 2:3). One-way ministry among believers is the exception. More often than not it is mutual edification. I am encouraged every Sunday and every Bible study as you share with me. We need each other. I have one gift, you have another. We need one another and the body is incomplete without

Commented [notes12]: 1 Peter 1:22 (ESV)

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

Commented [notes13]: 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

Commented [notes14]: Acts 22:3 (ESV)

³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

Commented [notes15]: 2 Corinthians 12:1 (ESV)

¹ I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

Commented [notes16]: Acts 14:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

Commented [notes17]: Philippians 2:3 (ESV)

³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

any one of us. These verses tell us of the genuine humility of the Apostle Paul. Real Christianity isn't being elitist but serving one another in love (Galatians 5:13).

Paul wanted to impart to them some spiritual gift to encourage them. We can interpret that a number of ways. He may have meant a gift of the Holy Spirit such as he referred to in his letter to Timothy. ¹⁴ *Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.* 1 Timothy 4:14 (ESV) The context tells us that was a gift of exhortation and teaching. Here in Romans it is somewhat defined in verse 12. He wanted them to be encouraged by his faith. Now the word "faith" can mean the gift of faith (1Corinthians 12:9), or it can be the entirety of his belief regarding Jesus and the Scriptures. In this case, I tend to believe it is the latter, as this letter is so filled with doctrine.

When believers get together, when you visit a church of another city, whenever and wherever we meet with those in Christ, we should be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. We should have testimonies to share, and inspiration from Scripture that God has laid on our hearts.

¹³ *I want you to know, 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.* Romans 1:13 (ESV) This tells us that the church was mostly made up of Gentiles, those to whom Paul is specifically called. The wording of the verse may challenge our interpretation of the word "harvest". I was taught harvest meant new believers. That can't be the case here for Paul is writing to believers telling them he wants to see a harvest among them. So what is the fruit he wants to harvest? Paul wants a harvest of the fruits of the Spirit among the believers in Rome (Galatians 5:22-23). He wants to see them mature in their faith so that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control are increasingly evident.

He wants to see the same harvest among the rest of the Gentiles as well. First, of course, we need Jesus, for we will never truly display the genuine fruits of the Spirit without Jesus. You won't have the Spirit until you receive Jesus. (Acts 2:38) **Paul doesn't just want them to say a prayer and sit in the Sunday meetings, he wants to see lives transformed and bearing the fruit of the Spirit.** That is how others hear about their faith. The fruit of the Spirit makes them different from the world and people talk about that. They may call them "fruitcakes" because they don't understand why they would save those babies, or risk their life to help during a plague, or risk imprisonment to feed a fellow Christian in jail. They may ascribe false motives to their behavior of caring concern or church discipline. Paul clearly tells us that all who are in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2Timothy 3:12).

The fruit of the Spirit is what causes the church to advance, and we should not be concerned about the cost to us personally. Paul wanted to reap a harvest in this

Commented [notes18]: Galatians 5:13 (ESV)

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Commented [notes19]: 1 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

Commented [notes20]: Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Commented [notes21]: Acts 2:38 (ESV)

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Commented [notes22]: 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

strategic church because he knew the result would be the advancement of the kingdom of God around the world, and it did! In a little over three centuries the little band of followers of Jesus would have grown so large that the Roman Empire converted. Nations change when churches change, and churches change when homes change, and homes are changed when we are changed. When the fruit of God's Spirit overflows in your life each day, anything and everything can change (Acts 17:6)!

¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. Romans 1:14-15 (ESV) Paul had a target, everyone! And how was he going to reach everyone? It was by preaching the gospel to the church in Rome. You see, the apostles believed that preaching the Scriptures was what transformed lives and resulted in believers bearing the fruit of the Spirit. The word convicts us to yield to the Spirit. As we yield to the Spirit we bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Preaching the good news (*euangelidzo*) is as powerful today as it was then. Our problem today is that so many preach something other than the word of God. Oh, there may be a verse thrown in here or there, but it is the life transforming power of the Word of God that changes us. You know when Christ is preached through the Word. Your spirit feels the power of it. It goes to work in you. It challenges you and convicts. It guides and corrects, encourages and instructs. It is the power of God to transform us. No wonder Paul told Timothy, "Preach the Word (2Timothy 4:2)!" and "Preach Christ crucified (1Corinthians 1:23)!" You young people that are thinking about going into preaching ministry, never forget it! Preach the Word! Preach Jesus!

One guest came church shopping and asked if I preached salvation every Sunday. I said, "Well, not every Sunday, but it comes up regularly." All I've got is Jesus. He is the salvation of God. He is the grace of God to us. Why preach anything else?

Paul said he had an obligation to those he was called to reach. Do we realize the obligation that God has given us? It is a gift, but it is also an obligation for we are bought with the greatest price. Love is being invested in us. Paul said necessity was laid on him to preach and woe to him if he didn't (1Corinthians 9:16). Woe to us if we do not yield ourselves to the Lord and his calling on our lives (1:7).

We've covered a lot of ground, so let me sum it up for you. Love, pray and give thanks for the body of Christ. Humbly realize you can be blessed by every believer as we have the same Holy Spirit teaching us. (John 14:26). The kingdom advances when we let the Holy Spirit's fruit be manifest in us. The fruit of the Spirit will make us so radically different from the world that people will be drawn to Christ. It's the good news of Jesus that transforms us by the power of the Word.

Questions

Commented [notes23]: Acts 17:6 (ESV)

⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,

Commented [notes24]: 2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)

² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Commented [notes25]: 1 Corinthians 1:23 (ESV)

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

Commented [notes26]: 1 Corinthians 9:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

Commented [notes27]: Romans 1:7 (ESV)

⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes28]: John 14:26 (ESV)

²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

- 1 What can we learn from Paul's repeated thanksgiving and prayer for the saints?
- 2 Review the stories of faith.
- 3 Are we living Romans 12:10?
- 4 How often should we pray for fellow believers?
- 5 Sum up the good news.
- 6 Do you share Paul's motivation?
- 7 What is one area the US church falls short?
- 8 How did Paul express humility?
- 9 What should happen when we gather?
- 10 What is the harvest?
- 11 How would he reap it?
- 12 How would he reach everyone?