

We have been over the doctrinal and exhortation portions of the letter to the Romans. Now Paul concludes his message with a summary of his mission and future plans. Next week we'll go over his final greetings. This portion of the letter gives us some insight into the way Paul understood his mission. He is as steeped in the Word of God as few people have ever been. That is why he interprets his life and calling in light of the Scriptures. When he accepted Jesus as the Messiah on the road to Damascus, he didn't throw out his Scriptures, the Old Testament. Instead, he reinterpreted it correctly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:22).

¹⁴ I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. Half of Paul's letter to the Romans was basic Christian doctrine. We are grateful that he spelled it out for them because it clarifies for us what the early church believed. Paul had not founded the church in Rome and had never been there, but he knew its strategic location was of vital importance to the spread of the Gospel. He wanted to be sure they were theologically sound, but he didn't want to insult them. As we noted last week, Paul realized that man's ego is fragile (Romans 14:19). He isn't flattering them when he tells the Roman believers that he is satisfied that they are full of

goodness and filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. Certainly he believed that from their testimony (Romans 1:8).

I don't know how many churches today we can say are filled with goodness and all knowledge. The only way to be filled with goodness is to be full of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:9). The only way to be filled with all knowledge is to be a student of the Word of God (2Timothy 2:15). So many churches seem to emphasize one over the other. Certainly there are churches today in which the believers can instruct one another. They are growing together in Christ. Our Bible study groups are like that. But it seems that churches are increasingly relying on paid staff members to do the work of ministry rather than expecting the body to grow and learn from one another's walk in the Spirit and life in the Word.

Some time ago I told you that I expect you to read ahead and pray about the upcoming passage. I expect to receive insights into the Word of God from your devotional time. I expect you to be feeding on the sincere milk of the Word because you love the Lord (1Peter 2:2). That is when we have those exciting times of sharing what the Lord is showing us and adding to one another's insights.

¹⁵ But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶

Commented [notes3]: Romans 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

Commented [notes4]: Ephesians 5:9 (NIV)

⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

Commented [notes5]: 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Commented [notes1]: Acts 9:22 (ESV)

²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

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

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation -

Commented [notes2]: Romans 14:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Though Paul was certain of the church in Rome's spiritual maturity, he boldly reminded them about the fundamentals of our faith. He did so, not out of his own intellect or previous rabbinical studies, but by the grace of God given to him to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. You'll recall that when Ananias was told to go and lay hands on Saul of Tarsus, he balked because of the damage Saul was doing to the church. The Lord told Ananias that Saul was chosen to carry the name of Jesus to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Later on, Paul realized that he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles which was confirmed by the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:7).

Paul saw this calling as his priestly duty. He wasn't from the tribe of Levi, but was assigned by God to bring the gospel of God to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21). The one who brings the message of God to the unbeliever is in one sense a priest. However, once the message has been received, the new believer also becomes a priest to share the good news with others (1Peter 2:5).

The last portion of the verse seems to indicate that Paul saw his calling in light of the prophecies. He saw himself as a part of the means of fulfilling the predictions that the Gentiles would be an offering to the Lord (Isaiah 66:20). He is the priest leading the way for this flow of Gentiles that will be sanctified by the Holy

Spirit to be an acceptable offering to God. Paul realized he was a key figure in bringing the light of the gospel of Jesus to this dark world so that the nations might become worshipers of the one true God. Someone needed to carry that light to the ends of the Gentile world (Isaiah 49:6). Chapter 12 of this letter began by telling the Romans (and us) to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God which is our reasonable act of worship (Romans 12:1). This is his message to all who will hear it. The light has come. Let it fill your soul. Let the salvation of Jesus transform your life so that you live for Him alone!

¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. Paul is not proud of himself, for he considers himself the worst of sinners (1Timothy 1:15). He is proud of his work for God in Christ Jesus. The life of Christ took over when Paul died to himself (Galatians 2:20). Then the grace of God worked in him mightily. He strategically went from one major crossroad to another planting churches and then checking up on them to be sure they were remaining true to the gospel of Jesus. Many of those churches then planted other churches. That is something to be proud of in Christ.

As believers, we have this paradox of knowing there is no good thing in ourselves (Romans 7:18), and yet when we die to ourselves and yield to the life of Christ, it is no longer our work but His. He does things that last. We run around busily doing things for God and find a year later that it was all for nothing. The life of Jesus, however, brings lasting fruit

Commented [notes12]: Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Commented [notes13]: Romans 12:1 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Commented [notes7]: Acts 9:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

Commented [notes14]: 1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Commented [notes8]: Galatians 2:7 (ESV)

⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised

Commented [notes15]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Commented [notes9]: Acts 22:21 (ESV)

²¹ And he said to me, "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles."

Commented [notes10]: 1 Peter 2:5 (ESV)

⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes16]: Romans 7:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Commented [notes11]: Isaiah 66:20 (ESV)

²⁰ And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD.

(John 15:16). All glory to Him. You can be proud of what He did in and through you.

18 For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, 19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; No need to talk about our big events that were our idea and produced no lasting fruit (John 15:5). Only when lives are transformed in their speech and actions can we say it was truly a work of God. When God intervenes in our affairs and does things that we know are way beyond us, when we listen in wonder at the words coming out of our mouths which speak right to the heart of those that listen, then we know the Spirit of God is at work through us. We are excited to talk about that because all the glory goes to God.

When someone starts in on how special they are and all they are doing for Jesus, you know they are either a baby Christian or a carnal one. Mature believers get pumped up talking about what *God* is doing, and all the glory goes to Him.

It is interesting that Paul says “from Jerusalem to Illyricum.” Illyricum was the westernmost point of his outreach, but why did he say starting in Jerusalem? He started in Damascus (Acts 26:20). He most likely has in mind Isaiah 2:3 and Micah 4:2 “out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the world of the LORD from

Jerusalem.” Both passages predict the Gentile nations going up the mount of the LORD. That is what he is about to do by bringing representatives from the Gentile churches with their offerings to the church in Jerusalem.

20 and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, 21 but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.” Paul quoted one of the Suffering Servant Songs, Isaiah 52:15. That song clearly predicts Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins and His resurrection. Going from town to town, Paul wanted to reach unreached areas for Jesus. New Tribes Missions took up this same goal and tries to only go into unreached areas today. In our lifetime, mission efforts are finishing the great work began by the apostle Paul and the other apostles to bring the light of the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

It can be our mission as well right here in a country that has rejected the light. You can meet children today that never heard of Jesus and are ignorant of the meaning of Christmas and Easter. It only took one generation to go from nearly everyone knowing the message of the Gospel to children growing up without ever having the light. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the next great youth rebellion was one against their parents’ agnostic secularism to faith in Jesus!

22 This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But

Commented [notes17]: John 15:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Commented [notes18]: John 15:5 (ESV)

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Commented [notes22]: Isaiah 52:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

Commented [notes23]: Acts 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Commented [notes19]: Acts 26:20 (ESV)

²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

Commented [notes20]: Isaiah 2:3 (ESV)

³ and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Commented [notes21]: Micah 4:2 (ESV)

² and many nations shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

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, ²⁴ 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. Certainly there were other cities in those regions, but they either had churches planted by others or Paul expected his church plants to evangelize them. Paul was out to reach new strategic territories. He's sharing with the church in Rome his plans for the future of his ministry after he completes this present stage. He didn't go to Rome earlier because there was already a church there. But now, on his way to Spain, he will get a chance to visit them. He would in fact go to Rome but in chains (Philippians 1:14). We do not know if he ever made it to Spain. He would have had to speak Latin, and it would have been a whole new experience, but that was his plan if the Lord was willing. Paul looked forward to fellowship with the church in Rome which he would experience.

²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ 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. Macedonia and Achaia were not the only areas involved in the contribution to Jerusalem which had undergone a famine (Acts 11:28), but those areas were the chief ones on Paul's mind. Macedonia had

also gone through a time of hardship, but they gave out of their poverty to bless the mother church in Jerusalem (2Corinthians 8:2). There had been some tension between Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and some who had come from the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem had been made up of Jews. Some of them, like Paul, had been Pharisees or priests (Acts 6:7). They had a hard time understanding that Gentile converts did not need to keep the Jewish food laws or become circumcised. While Paul harshly criticized them (Galatians 1:6-8), he never criticized the church in Jerusalem. Perhaps Paul saw this as a way of mending any animosity that may have been held by some and helping them see that God was fulfilling His word through the ministry of Paul.

He may have also thought that the fellowship with these representatives from the Gentile churches would also help allay any concerns they might have as to the sincerity and conviction of the Gentile churches. In his letter to the Corinthians regarding this contribution, we see a hint of Paul's thinking. He wrote, ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 2 Corinthians 9:13-14 (ESV) Paul may have been hoping that the witness of the surpassing grace of God upon these Gentiles would confirm their fellowship in the Spirit.

Commented [notes26]: 2 Corinthians 8:2 (NIV)

² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Commented [notes27]: Acts 6:7 (ESV)

⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Commented [notes28]: Galatians 1:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Commented [notes24]: Philippians 1:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Commented [notes25]: Acts 11:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

While Paul was clear that his teaching came by revelation and not from man (Galatians 1:11-12), he recognized that Jerusalem was the center from which the Gospel went out and where its glorious plan would culminate. It was there in the temple that he heard God's call to go to the Gentiles and there he would bring an account of his stewardship (Acts 22:21). Though his converts could not go into the temple, it would be there that he would spiritually present them to God. Then his new phase of ministry would begin.

Verse 27 also tells us that spiritual ministry can be work that should be supported financially. For those that labor fulltime in teaching and preaching or some other means of bringing the Gospel to the world, it is only right that their physical needs are met (1Corinthians 9:14).

³⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, Paul had concerns about the unbelieving Jews would look upon his arrival in Jerusalem and for good reason. If it hadn't been for the intervention by Roman soldiers they would have torn him apart on the temple grounds (Acts 21:31-32). He hoped they would see the offering and converts and recognize that he was not against them but seeking their good. Perhaps he even thought it may be the beginning of the Jewish nation's acceptance of Jesus and the fulfillment of what he wrote in

chapter 11 regarding the salvation of all Jews (Romans 11:26).

His prayer request was answered in that Paul was delivered from unbelieving Jews. Then, through incarceration by Rome, he had the opportunity to write letters which have nourished the church ever since. He also witnessed to kings, dignitaries, the imperial guard, and Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22). Paul saw his incarceration as advancing the gospel (Philippians 1:11-12). It's encouraging to see that even the great apostle Paul did not know what God was up to, but was used mightily even in what seemed to be the worst possible situation.

This passage speaks to me of the passion of a servant of God to glorify God and complete the mission God assigns them. We may not know what tomorrow holds, but we know the One who holds tomorrow. Let's follow the example of the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 11:1) giving our all to glorify God and trusting Him for whatever God has in store for us tomorrow.

Questions

- 1 How can we be full of goodness and knowledge?
- 2 What was Paul's priestly duty?
- 3 What can we be proud of?
- 4 How can we spot God's fruit?
- 5 Why did Paul say, "starting in Jerusalem"?
- 6 What Scriptures may Paul have seen being fulfilled?
- 7 Why did Paul go to unreached areas?
- 8 What was Paul's present mission?
- 9 What did it mean to him?
- 10 What was his concern?

Commented [notes33]: Romans 11:26 (ESV)

²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"

Commented [notes29]: Galatians 1:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes30]: Acts 22:21 (ESV)

²¹ • And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'

Commented [notes34]: Philippians 4:22 (ESV)

²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

Commented [notes35]: Philippians 1:12-13 (ESV)

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Commented [notes31]: 1 Corinthians 9:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Commented [notes36]: 1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV)

¹ • Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Commented [notes32]: Acts 21:31-32 (NIV)

³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.