

Prayer Request: Proclaiming the Gospel to a People Whose Faith Is Famous (1:8-10)

^{1:8}First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. ^{1:9}For God, Whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, ^{1:10}always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

Thanks (1:8)

- Notice the nature of Paul’s thanksgiving:
 - He is thanking his “God.” In 1:7 the apostle called God “our Father.” Giving thanks specifically to the Person Who is God the Father is also seen in Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 1:3,12,17.
 - His thanks to God is “through Jesus Christ.” As I mentioned last week, this little preposition “through” is theologically significant when speaking of Christ. We cannot have any relationship with the Father except through the Son, Who is “the one mediator between God and man” (1 Timothy 2:5). This includes thanksgiving to God. It must go “through” the Mediator.¹
- The faith of the Romans is famous.² There will be two echoes of Paul’s sentiment here later in the letter: READ 6:17; 16:19. Notice that, when we take all

¹ Remember that Paul gives us the title, “Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:4), and then tells us “through Whom we have received grace and apostleship” (1:5).

² I believe it is only appropriate to give thanks to God for the faith of the Romans if God is the One Who gave the Romans that faith. Romans 10:9 should be read with 1 Corinthians 12:3. Paul prays for the salvation of unbelieving Jews (Romans 10:1) – why would he do this if salvation were left solely up to the free will of man?

these statements into account, the “famous faith” of the Romans was noticeable due to their obedience to the commandments that are part of the application of the Christian faith.³

Paul’s Service (1:9a)

- Again, when Paul speaks of serving “God,” he has the Father in mind (since the “Son” is mentioned in the sentence).
- Paul’s service is spiritual, not merely fleshly. It is heavenly, not merely earthly. It is for eternity, not merely now. A believer’s spirit is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Our service is Spiritual with a capital “S.”
 - “...we serve in the newness of the Spirit” (Romans 7:6).
 - Our rebirth is the result of the invisible movement of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8).
 - As the true covenant people of God, we worship Him by the help and power of the Holy Spirit (John 4:24,25; Philippians 3:3; Revelation 1:10).
 - In addition, we pray by reliance on the help and power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26,27; Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20), Who moves us to call on God the Father (Romans 8:15).

The Prayer Request (1:9b,10)

- We now return to one of the outcomes Paul hopes to achieve through his interaction with the Romans. The global mission of the Gospel is the reason Paul wants to build a relationship with the Roman Church (15:23,24).

³ Remember: we don’t obey to be saved, but the saved do obey. The indicative (the declaration of what Christ has accomplished to save us) is always followed by imperative (the commands of Christ to those whom He has saved).

The Fruitful Blessings of Fellowship (1:11-13)

1:11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 1:12 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. 1:13 I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Imparting a Gift (1:11)

- Spiritual gifts cannot be separated from their Source, God the Holy Spirit. “...there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12:4,7,11).⁴
- READ Romans 12:1-8. Compare the “living and holy sacrifice” (12:1) language with Paul’s language of serving God in 1:9. Gifts graciously given by the Spirit are given in the context of being part of “one body” in Christ.
 - This seems to be a good time to mention the doctrine of vocation. While the apostle was called to and gifted for full-time preaching/teaching and church planting, this doesn’t mean his calling/gifting is superior to yours. We are each called and gifted to be part of Christ’s Body, and each one of us, regardless of education/training/skill, is capable of being used of God for His glory as part of His Church. The commands to slaves and masters (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1,2;

⁴ In the same way, the “spiritual blessing” of Ephesians 1:3 should be understood to be a blessing which comes from God the Holy Spirit. There is no “spiritual” apart from the Holy Spirit.

Titus 2:9,10) can be analogously read as instruction for being an employee or supervisor/manager. In these roles in our jobs, no matter the job, we are given a theology that guides us toward serving God in our spirits every day.⁵

- At the same time, we see God the Holy Spirit working through leaders in the Church to gift individuals (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6).⁶
- God the Holy Spirit works in our lives in two primary ways:
 - Through the Bible which He has inspired.⁷
 - The local church, from which He works to accomplish the global Gospel mission.

Encouraged Together (1:12)

- “...I long to see you so 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” (1:11,12). The verb “encouraged together” is in the same word family as one of the titles of the

⁵ “...no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God’s sight.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.10.6.

⁶ Similarly, the Holy Spirit uses the “prophets and teachers” in the church in Antioch to send Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey. These church leaders were dedicated to “ministering to the Lord and fasting,” and it was after they “fasted and laid their hands on them” that they sent the two men on mission. It’s not either church leadership or the Holy Spirit; it’s both. The Holy Spirit uses godly church leadership, it would seem, to send missionaries into the field.

⁷ It is meant to be the foundation of true Christian fellowship. There is no place with more potential for power than the gathering of the Spirit-filled people to worship together in the Spirit-inspired Book: “...all Scripture is...the true center of Christian union” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, 1).

Holy Spirit, “Helper” (as in John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7).⁸ The Holy Spirit Who gives the “spiritual gift” of 1:11 manifests that gift as the Encourager in the midst of the gathering of believers.

Obtaining Fruit (1:13)

Obligated to All for the Sake of the Gospel (1:14,15)

1:14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 1:15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Made for This

- God purposed Paul to be apostle to the non-Jews from his mother’s womb (Galatians 1:15,16). This is one of the first things he tells the Romans about himself: “...set apart for the Gospel of God” (Romans 1:1). He considers his greatest service to God to be the preaching of this Gospel (1:9). He is eager to build unity in the Roman church and fellowship with them in the preaching of the Gospel (1:15). The Gospel consumes and drives Paul. What role does it play in your life?

Eager to Preach the Gospel

- The Gospel is to be proclaimed to all. The Church Jesus built on the heaven-sent apostolic confession of Him has been given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:13-20). This is the Gospel mission.
- Deciding that certain groups or peoples are unworthy of the Gospel, or making the determination that they will not respond to the Gospel by faith, shows a weak doctrine of the fallen-ness of man and a weak doctrine of the Holy Spirit.
 - If you believe that human beings are not “dead in...trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), but

⁸ “Encouraged together” (συμπαράκαλεω) and “Helper” (παράκλητος). The same word-family lies at the heart of these words.

only crippled or sick, then you will believe that human beings, in their own wisdom, intelligence, or moral goodness, can choose to come to life by believing the offer of the Gospel in their own power. You will evaluate a group or people’s intelligence, perceived receptiveness to the Gospel, or goodness, and decide on your own whether or not they are worthy of hearing the Gospel. “They are too wicked or resistant to respond to the Gospel, so we must deal with group or people in some way other than evangelistically,” you might say. The Bible, however, tells us that we are dead in sin. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). All. You prior to rebirth in Christ were just as lost as the most vile group or people on earth. The same eternal damnation awaited both you and them. A biblical doctrine of sin reveals that we are all equally dead in sin and cannot save ourselves. Therefore, all need to hear the Gospel, and it is up to us to proclaim it.

- What is the decisive power in being saved by faith in Christ? If you believe it to be the will of man alone, you need to re-read the Scripture’s truth about the absoluteness of the fallen-ness of human beings.⁹ It is only by

⁹ Our Baptist spiritual forefathers described man’s lost-ness: “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto” (1689 Baptist Confession, 9.3). We have free will, but before we come to Christ we will only freely will against God and His truth. This is consistent with Romans 6. Our current confession as Baptists echoes this truth: “Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed

the gracious moving of the Holy Spirit that we come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. “...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3b).¹⁰ If we, utterly dead in sin and hopelessly alienated from God, were saved by Spirit-wrought faith in Jesus Christ, then anyone can be. All must hear the Gospel, for all are equally lost and all can be “caused...to be born again” (1 Peter 1:3) if God so wills it. “...it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God Who has mercy” (Romans 9:16). We are called to send others to proclaim and ourselves to proclaim the Gospel to the lost without reservation (Romans 10:14,15). We have example of the apostle’s own prayers to God for salvation for the lost (Romans 10:1). We must be about these two tasks, for God uses them to accomplish His salvation among all peoples everywhere.

- We must be purposeful about building Gospel-sighted relationships. Are you building relational bridges for the Gospel, or are you

the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, 3).

¹⁰ See also Matthew 16:16,17 (the Father revealed the saving confession of Christ to Peter from heaven); John 3:6-8 (the invisible Spirit moves us to rebirth); Acts 13:48; 16:14; Philippians 1:29.

allowing worldly divisions to cut you off from sharing the Gospel with your neighbors (physical neighbors or cyber-neighbors)? Like Paul, we are obligated to share the Gospel with all.

What About Chapter 15?

- READ 15:20,21. What do we do with this? After all, Paul declares in 1:15 that he desires to “preach the gospel” to the Roman church, where “Christ was already named.” How does this fit with his desire “to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named”? To resolve this, we need to keep in mind Paul’s purpose for writing the letter to the Romans: **...to unify the local church for global mission through the right understanding and application of the Gospel.** 15:23,24 tells us he hasn’t come to them because he’s been proclaiming the gospel in “regions” which hadn’t heard, but he has his sights on “Spain.” He wants to unify the Roman Church in letter and in person by the power of the Gospel so that they will help him move to the westward boundaries of the Roman Empire.¹¹

Self-check: Do you confess a faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Is it a faith the people around you both hear and see out of your life? Is it a faith that is growing in Spirit-empowered and Word-based regular fellowship, worship, and service with other believers?

¹¹ I suspect there’s a lesson here for modern thoughts on ministry/missions. Paul didn’t see the high point of his mission to be a ministry in the capital city of the Empire. He had his sights set on the far borderlands of the Empire. In our flesh we want to be noticed, to have big influence, to be in the center of things. Paul wanted to unify the saints in the center so that they’d reach out to the saints on the edge.