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A1417 – April 27, 2014 – Romans 1:8-15
Paul's Longing To Visit Rome

We've been working our way up to the main body of Romans by looking first at the introductory and background, then we started the verse by verse with Paul's salutation in 1:1-7. Today we will look at Paul's desire to visit the Romans 1:8-15. Next week we'll look at the theme of Romans 1:16-17. Finally we'll begin with the first section of the main body, 1:18-3:2-, universal condemnation.

Last week we covered Paul's salutation which follows in the main the customary ancient formula for personal letters; an identification of the author, Paul, an identification of the audience, the saints at Rome, and a greeting, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He also follows his own custom of breaking from the formula to reveal in germ form the subject of the letter, which is the gospel. Dr Beet summarizes with magnificent clarity saying, "Paul's opening sentence is a crystal arch spanning the gulf between the Jew of Tarsus and the Christians at Rome. Paul begins by giving his name; he rises to the dignity of his office, and then to the Gospel he proclaims. From the Gospel he ascends to its great Subject Matter, to Him Who is the Son of David and Son of God. From this summit of his arch he passes on to his apostleship again, and to the nations for whose good he received it. Among these nations he finds the Christians at Rome...The gulf is spanned. Across the waters of national separation Paul has flung an arch whose firmly knit segments are living truths, and whose Keystone is the Incarnate Son of God."

Today we come to verses 8-15, and here Paul thanks God for them because of the positive reports he has heard about them, he mentions his prayers for them and for his coming to them, his strong desire to see them, his desire to obtain some fruit among them, his obligation to them and his eagerness to

preach the gospel to them. The main idea is his desire to visit them. It can be broken down into seven basic ideas; 1) his thanksgiving to God, 2) his service in preaching the gospel, 3) his prayers for them, 4) his longing desire to come to them, 5) his desire to encourage them, 6) his obligation to them and 7) his eagerness to preach the gospel to them. Through these seven aspects we learn that Paul had a desire to be with other believers and carry out his commission and we are challenged to emulate him. Paul's desires should be our desires. Practically, it will do us no good to simply dig into Paul's heart and then keep our distance by avoiding any personal application. We're supposed to closely scrutinize Paul, not as an end in itself, but as a means to the end of personally applying it to ourselves. So we will closely analyze Paul but the goal is to apply the great discoveries in Paul to ourselves so we can emulate him.

Beginning in Rom 1:8 Paul starts with his thanksgiving to God. He says, **First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.** This is one of only two places where Paul starts a numerical list but then does not continue the list (cf 1 Cor 11:18). In any regard the first thing he reveals to them is his thankfulness to his **God...for them**. This thankfulness is said to be **through Jesus Christ**. The preposition **through** is *dia*. **Jesus Christ** is in the genitive case. This construction is causal and should be translated, **I thank my God** "because of" **Jesus Christ**. "Because of" **Jesus Christ** involves all that Christ has done for you to save you. Because of Him you possess God. He's your **God** and **my God** entirely because of **Jesus Christ**. In other words, apart from Jesus Christ you don't possess God, you have nothing in God. In fact, you can't even thank God. That's what Paul is going to say in verse 21 of pagan Gentiles, they know God but don't honor him as God or give thanks. It wouldn't even be possible to thank Him because the thanks is only accepted through Jesus Christ. But this idea that you can't possess God apart from Jesus Christ goes even further. All that you have and all that you are as a believer is because of **Jesus Christ**. McClain says, "Every good thing we have—whether it is the glorious privilege of thanking God for the favors received, or the right to look up into the face of God and say, "My God," comes through Jesus Christ."¹ That's right. Paul said that to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 3:21ff, "For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God." Who's

the critical link in the chain? Christ. If you don't have Him you don't have God and you don't have anything else. So the bottom line is that all that you have and all that you are is entirely because of Jesus Christ.

The thanks that Paul is giving God here is **for...all** the saints at Rome. They too have what they have and are what they are because of Jesus Christ. Note the key word, **all**. **All** refers to **all** and **all** the saints at Rome had accomplished something rather unique both in the ancient and modern world. This is what Paul is thanking God for. What had they done? Their **faith** was **being proclaimed throughout the whole world**. They had a tremendous testimony. The whole world was hearing of one church. Of course, by the **whole world** Paul is not referring to the entire planet. The **whole world** is hyperbole for how widespread the news of their **faith** had traveled.

Everywhere Paul set foot he heard reports of their faith. The expression **your faith** is an objective genitive. It does not refer to their giving the gospel or the number of those coming to faith but to their positive expression of the Christian faith. The Roman saints had distinguished themselves from the surrounding pagan culture by separating from pagan practices and living the Christian faith. This was radical and rare in the early church. Rome was full of the mystery religions and every city boasted its gods and goddesses. So to turn to God from these idols was a rare occurrence. The Thessalonians provide another noteworthy example. Paul said to them "the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth." They had a remarkable testimony. Paul says they "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess 1:8-10; also cf Eph 1:15-16; Col 1:3-4). This is, of course, what we should do. Yes, as individuals but more as a church; we should have a testimony that we are distinct from the world, not distinct just to be distinct, but distinctly separated unto God. Our culture too is bedecked with idols of materialism and evolutionism and politicism and feminism. These idols are first images in the mind and only afterward they come to adorn our culture on a popular level. Do we as a church accommodate to these idols or are we counter-cultural, are we producing a sub-culture that results in our faith being proclaimed throughout the whole world? That is what we are aiming for. Trained Christians who are distinctly different and bring something far superior to the table that the world cannot offer. This is what the believers at Rome were doing and Paul was giving thanks to God because of Jesus Christ for it. Apart from Him they never could have done it because all that we have

and all that we are is due to Him. Would that we would hear more of this news about churches and far less of the compromising shameful practices so common in the church today. Paul's thanks his God because of Jesus Christ for all the saints who actually are taking a stand and consequently their faith is being proclaimed throughout the world. We should want to be known the world over too, that would mean we are making a large difference.

In Romans 1:9 we turn to the second pattern of Paul we are to emulate, his service to God. **For God, who I serve in my spirit.** Note the word **serve**. This is not a derivative of the word we saw in verse 1, a **bond-servant**, as wonderful as that word is. This is a different wonderful Greek word. This one refers to "priestly service" and is closely related to "worship" (cf Phil 3:3). It is the word used in the LXX of the service rendered in the OT temple by the priests (cf Josh 22:27). In the NT all believers are priests, meaning we have access to God through Christ independent of any human priesthood. We don't need a class of men to mediate between us and God; some religious hierarchy. 1 Tim 2:5 says, "For there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." We need no hired priests, we are each individual priests. We can offer Him our priestly service in spirit. We cannot serve God in our flesh, the flesh is corrupt; we must worship Him in **spirit**. This echoes Jesus' prediction in John 4 that a time was coming when the true worshippers of God would worship Him in spirit and truth, or more likely, "in spiritual truth" since the two nouns separated by *kai* are controlled by a single preposition. Paul's point is that his priestly service was carried out in spirit, that is, in terms of the new supernatural life that he now enjoyed. This living of that life requires the work of the Holy Spirit of course. We should emulate Paul by serving God out of our new supernatural life. This requires dependence upon the Holy Spirit. The realm of Paul's priestly service is then described as **in the proclamation of the gospel of God's Son**. Paul carried out **the proclamation of the gospel** by way of the new life he possessed in dependence upon the Spirit. It was not done in the power of the flesh. It is important once more to note that the gospel centers on God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Without him there is no gospel. The gospel is about Jesus Christ. Any so-called gospel that focuses on something else is not the gospel. So Paul was a priest and had an altar similar to the OT priest, but it was not an altar where the blood of bulls and goats was shed, those sacrifices were only good for cleansing the external flesh. Paul's altar of service was the cross

of Christ where He shed His own blood; His sacrifice is good for the cleansing of the **spirit** so that we have a new life by which we can serve God.

Third, at the end of verse 9 we find another pattern of Paul we should emulate; prayers for other believers. **God...he says, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request.** In line with his own command given to the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17) he reports that as **God is** his witness he **unceasingly** makes **mention of** them in his prayers. To “pray without ceasing” means to repetitively on a consistent basis pray for someone or something. Looking at other letters of Paul where he says similar things to other congregations we realize that Paul must have had a remarkably long prayer list or else a stupendous memory. It is interesting that the NT commands us to pray without ceasing and not preach without ceasing. Paul could not preach without ceasing, there were times when he had no one to preach to, but one thing he could do at all times was pray. So we are to “pray without ceasing.”

Paul uses two of the words for prayer in this verse; there are six in the Greek language. First he uses the most common word *proseuche*, translated **prayers**. It is used 36 times in the NT. It is the general word for prayer. It simply means “a petition.” It shows that Paul made petitions for the saints at Rome. Second he uses *deomai*, translated **making request**. It is used 22 times in the NT. It is the word that refers to “begging” God for something. Both words refer to making requests of God. When all six words are looked at you come to this same conclusion; all the words for prayer involve asking God for something. Recently I heard Dr Toussaint teach that prayer is not fundamentally talking to God or praising God but asking God for something. He said the other things we do such as praise or confession are not part of the prayer, though we may do them and that is proper, they are not part of the prayer itself because when our Lord taught us to pray in Matt 6 he taught us to ask things of him and all six words for prayer in the Greek involve asking. His point was that the fundamental meaning of prayer is “asking something of God.” Other things like praise, thanksgiving and confession may be mixed in but they are not the prayer itself. I add those things and those things are good, but they are not part of the prayer.

From these words, two of which are used here, it is apparent that prayer is a vital ministry. We must ask things of God if we want to receive. James said, you have not because you ask not, you ask with wrong motives and therefore don't receive. Prayer is critical. Recently I was told that someone had a view of the sovereignty of God that led them to think prayer was a worthless endeavor; what God was going to do, God was going to do, therefore why pray? That is fatalism not sovereignty. Fatalism is a pagan concept. It means all is impersonal determinism. Sovereignty is not impersonal, it is personal. God is a person and He genuinely interacts with His creatures in a personal way. God even personally prompts some people to pray. He does this because He has conditioned certain things in His plan on human prayer. So conditional are these things that if the human prayer is not offered it will not come to pass in history. Prayer is therefore necessary for some things to come to pass. A case in point is the dialogue between God and Moses in Exod 32. God threatened to destroy all the Jews and start over with Moses. This seems to present a contradiction since Moses was of the tribe of Levi. If God destroyed all the Jews except him then how would the Messianic line continue through the tribe of Judah? On one hand we must maintain that God's threat was genuine and not mere theater. On the other hand we must maintain that If Moses had not interceded God would have destroyed the Messianic line. Yet God, because He is God would not allow that to happen. Therefore what God was doing was presenting a true cause-effect scenario which He intended to fully carry out under the condition that no prayer intervened. The fact that Moses interceded was the condition that was required so that God would spare them. This does not settle well with those prone to worship at the altar of human rationalism; yet it is most humbly accepted by all who honor divine revelation. God stated a true intent and a true reality; I will destroy the house of Judah. It was no joking matter. Moses prayed against this. When he did God spared Israel. It was therefore through the prayer of Moses that the line of Judah was spared. The example could be replicated numerous times in Scripture. It demonstrates that God is a God who is personal and answers prayer. We should therefore avoid all concepts of sovereignty that are fatalistic because fatalism destroys prayer. On the other hand a proper view of God's personal sovereignty will stimulate prayer because we know that God has conditioned some things in His plan on prayer.

Notice how Paul avoids fatalism in verse 10 but yet affirms sovereignty.

Making request, if perhaps at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. He mentions **making request** but also **the will of God**.

This was no problem to Paul, it's only a problem for those prone to worship their own rationalism, which is idolatry, the opposite of true worship.

Paul's **request**, note, singular in the Greek text, his one request which is a begging type of request, was that **at long last he may succeed in coming to** visit them at Rome. He had wanted and tried to come for a long time but thus far he says in Romans 15 he had been prevented. A careful look at the prevention is revealing. Paul envisioned the gospel going out from Jerusalem to all the nations. In fact, that is Jesus' great commission in the Book of Acts; there were stages, starting in Jerusalem, then moving out to Judea and Samaria and finally to the remotest parts of the earth. Logically this involved moving out in concentric circles emanating from Jerusalem. When the gospel was fully preached in one circle, churches were established and the believers trained to carry on the ministry then the gospel would move out to the next circle. Rome was quite a distance from Jerusalem. He had had longed to go to Rome for some time but it was beyond the circle he was working in. The gospel had not been fully preached in the circle he was in and so he was prevented from going to Rome until he finished the work in the present circle. That seems to be the nature of the prevention. In verse 10 Paul's request is that he now, by the will of God, be able to come to Rome. It should be carefully noticed that Paul was entirely confident that he would **succeed**. This is reflected in the Greek text by the fact it is a first class condition, unfortunately translated as uncertain in most translations, Paul was not uncertain at all. It should be translated with entire confidence. Paul is saying, "I will finally succeed in coming to you by the will of God." How did Paul know this? Because he had finished his work in the prior circle. The Corinthian's were now stable. They were the last holdouts in that circle. It was now God's will for him to come to them. Now in the historical outworking the circumstances of how he would come were entirely unknown to Paul. Eventually he was to come in chains. But what was entirely known to Paul was that it was the will of God for him to succeed in coming. So the third thing is Paul's prayer life and the question is what is your prayer life like? Is it one of praying without ceasing or is it hit and miss? Paul's prayer would be answered in due time because the prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Fourth, in verse 11, another pattern of Paul's, to reveal his eager longing to share a spiritual benefit with other believers. Do you have that eager longing? He says, **For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established.** Many believers don't even **long to see** other believers at all. They'd rather avoid believers. I had one guy a few weeks ago slip into my office to share with me the message he was concerned about getting to people. It was that someone had to be water baptized in order to go to heaven. He emphasized that he attended no church and gathered with no believers and that he came up with this just from reading the Bible. He pointed to many verses putting a 21st century spin on them. Among other things I challenged that man to follow God's word which says "stop forsaking assembling" with other believers. He was coming to some very strange interpretations. No one is a lone ranger in the Church. The Church is not solely composed of you, the church is a body of all believers, and every part is essential to every other part and necessary for the proper function of the body. Paul didn't long to be away from believers, he longed to be with believers. The purpose clause sets out why, **so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established.** The translation is probably not correct. Paul is probably not referring to sharing his **spiritual gift** with them, but rather with sharing something that would be a spiritual blessing to them. Greek scholar Dan Wallace says, "it simply means something akin to a blessing or benefit in the spiritual realm."ⁱⁱ This is confirmed by the idea in verse 12 that by this their faith would be strengthened. The Greek adverb **some** indicates the variety of ways that Paul might bless them spiritually. The blessing may come through the use of a spiritual gift but we are not to limit it to the spiritual gifts to bless. In 1 Cor 12 Paul says there are a variety of gifts, ministries and results. There are many combinations and permutations by which we may benefit others in the spiritual realm. The goal of them all is that Paul wanted the believers at Rome to **be established** or "strengthened." This should be the intent of our desire to be with other believers, to confer some spiritual benefit that will strengthen them as believers. The all-important question is whether you and I emulate Paul: do we long to be with other believers so that we may share some spiritual blessing with them? If not, something's wrong, we are not walking with God.

Now at this point Paul realized that they might take it that he thinks he is spiritually superior to them, as if they needed to benefit from his gift but he

had nothing to benefit from them. So he quickly follows up in verse 12 by clarifying, **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.** Paul realized the mutual benefit of the visit. Through this, observe, the encouragement would be both ways, each party strengthening the other party **by the other's faith.** This again shows that the specifics of spiritual gifts are not really in view but the more general spiritual blessings that strengthen our faith mutually. We want our faith to be built up, strengthened. That requires that we be together and that we bless one another in the spiritual realm; the results are mutual, **both yours and mine.**

Verse 13, Paul mentions another reason he wants to come to them, in order to obtain some fruit. **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.** Paul's ministry was primarily to the Gentiles while Peter's was to the Jews. This note indicates that the majority of the church at Rome were Gentiles, though we know there were also Jews (cf Acts 28). The Church had begun Jewish and expanded to include Gentiles and was now dominated by Gentiles. As such Paul wanted to obtain some fruit among them. He mentions that it was important for them to understand that he had often **planned to come to** them but had **been prevented so far.** Paul did plan. Some believers think the NT teaches that we should not plan because of the James 4 passage which says, "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." However, this passage is not saying Christians should not plan, it is saying they should not plan without regard to God. God has a plan and His plan for our lives may or may not be our plan. When our plan doesn't work out we should adjust to His plan and accept it as the best course. He may be trying to remind us that He is in control and we are not, an important lesson to remember. But this does not mean we should not plan. To not have a plan is foolish. To plan without regard to God is equally foolish. To plan with regard to God is the only wise course. This is how Paul lived. He had planned for years **to come to** the Romans. Thus far God had prevented him. As we saw earlier the prevention was by means of a failure to establish

the Corinthians within his present circle of ministry. Before he could expand he needed to establish them. Now that they were Paul was certain it was God's will for him to come to Rome.

Now, a word about God's will and being prevented. Sometimes Christians think they ought to do something and then they trot down that course and get a door slammed in their face. They interpret this as not being God's will. Let me tell you that that is not necessarily true. God may be testing you to see if you are steadfast. Paul had wanted to come to the Romans for years and had been prevented. This did not mean it was not God's will but that it was not God's timing.

Finally, the purpose Paul wanted to come to them in verse 13 was to **obtain some fruit among** them. The fruit is not rewards at the judgment seat of Christ so much as it is some fruit from ministering to them some things in the spiritual realm, benefitting them.

In verse 14 we come to Paul's indebtedness to both Greek and barbarian. **I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.** The **barbarians** and **Greeks** were the two divisions of the Gentile world, the very world Paul ministered too. Ultimately **barbarians** were divided from **Greeks** by both culture and language, the vehicle of culture. The Greeks considered anyone who did not speak Greek a barbarian. Paul, however, was indebted to both groups. He was also indebted to **the wise and to the foolish.** The **wise and the foolish** were the two divisions of intellectual society; we would say "the educated and the non-educated." Paul was indebted to them both. One's language, culture or educational status was not a stumbling block to Paul. Christ came to die for all people of all languages, cultures and educational status'.

Why was Paul under obligation? Eph 3 explains that he had a revelation debt. The debt was acquired when God revealed to him the new truth regarding the mystery nature of the church as Jew and Gentile in Christ. This new body is neither Jew nor Greek but one new man. Gentile believers did not have to adopt Judaism in order to enter the church, they entered in the same way as a Jew, simply by faith in Jesus Christ. Since Paul was one of the apostles who had received this revelation he was indebted to proclaim

this message to others. By doing so he would relieve his indebted status. Therefore Paul wanted to come and get this burden off his shoulders.

As verse 15 shows he was ready and willing to do so. **So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.** By **gospel** in the letter to the Romans Paul is referring to the message that we are justified by grace through faith, sanctified by grace through faith and glorified by grace through faith. Salvation from beginning to end is a work of God's grace enjoyed through faith. Paul was **eager to preach this gospel** to those at Rome. Are you eager to preach this gospel to those in your sphere of influence?

In conclusion, what Paul has done by example is give us each seven challenges. First, in verse 8, are we thankful to God for other believers who are taking a stand on the faith once for all delivered to the saints and are not compromising with all the idols of culture? Second, in verse 9, are we serving God in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Third, in verses 9-10, do we pray without ceasing for other believers? Do we realize that without prayer some things simply will not come to pass? Fourth, in verses 11-12, do we long to be with other believers in order to benefit them spiritually? If not, something is wrong. Do we realize that we too may benefit from them? Fifth, in verse 13, do we desire to obtain fruit among believers by conferring some spiritual benefit on them? Sixth, in verse 14, do we distinguish between those we minister to on the basis of different language, culture or educational status? If we do something's wrong. Seventh, in verse 15, are we eager to preach the gospel? If not, again, something is wrong. Paul has challenged us by giving us an example. Next time he will set forth the theme of Romans which is the gospel according to God's righteousness.

ⁱ McClain, p 46.

ⁱⁱ Biblical Studies Press. (2006). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press.

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