

40:15

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Introduction

Well think about receiving a letter from someone that you have never met. Then you read this letter, and it starts off with this.

Hello, my name is so and so and I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ (meaning I'm sent personally by Jesus Christ Himself.) We've never met, but I hope to visit you soon. I'm an ambassador for the gospel, and I'm not ashamed of this message. Everyone who doesn't believe in God is under His wrath. God is judging them, and He's turned them over to their own lusts. No one is good, not even one. Do you think you're good? You're wrong. You're not! No one is good. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Should you keep on sinning so that God's grace may abound? May it never be! You can consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you will obey it's lusts. Those who are of the flesh cannot please God. You think you can in your flesh? You're wrong. You can't. It's impossible. No one in their flesh can please God.

But God is the one who justifies sinners. Why does God choose to save sinners? Because it's all about His glory and His sovereign choice. Oh, and by the way, don't question God. He's sovereign. He's in control of it all. Don't question Him. Who are you to question God?

Gentiles, Gentile Christians, don't become proud and puffed up because you're now accepted by God. But God has rejected the Jews, Israel, the nation. What happened to Israel? Well, I'll tell you, God has set them aside because of their rejection of Him. But He will save them in the

future because of His promise that He made to them. God is a God who always keeps His promises.

Don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to, meaning humble yourself, think lower of yourself, you already think too highly of yourself. Humble yourself. Pay your taxes. As much as it depends on you be at peace with all men. Oh, by the way, every one of us is going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be held accountable for every word and every deed. Love one another, accept one another, build one another up and be of the same mind.

And you might get to the end of that letter and go, "Wow. Who is this guy that's writing all of this? There was a lot to say to us. Pretty blunt, and bold and straightforward. This guy is not holding anything back, is he? There's a lot of theology in there. And then he gave us two and a half chapters full of commands for us to obey. Who is this guy?"

That's what Paul did to the Romans. That's his letter to the Romans. And Paul even realizes how bold and blunt and straightforward he was. In fact, we read this, Romans 15 In verse 15. Look what he says there. *"But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, (Rom 15:15)* Paul recognizes even himself that some of the things that he wrote, were bold and straightforward. He's holding nothing back.

So why does Paul write like this to a church that he's never met? I mean, he's a pastor. An evangelist, planting churches. And being someone who has never visited this church before, shouldn't he have written something like this?

I've never met you but hope to one day. I'm sure you're really good, awesome, amazing people. I bet you love the Lord, even though you have struggles in life. But I just want you to know that Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

I hope that by the time you're done reading my letter that you have warm, fuzzy feelings. Yes, I want to write truth to you. But that might offend some people there. And it might make some of you not feel so good. But remember this, you're amazing Just the way you are. Oh, and did you know, Jesus loves you!

Paul didn't write anything like that. Why? Because he loved this church. Because he loved the believers in Rome, even though he has never met them before. He loves them. And he knew that the most important thing that they needed in their life was truth.

They needed the truth. He knew that they were a spiritually strong church. Because they are as we're going to see. But he knew that they need to be needed to be reminded of the truth of God. They needed to be reminded of the work of God. And they needed to be reminded of how to live in light of the truth of God and His work.

And now in Paul's letter in chapter 15, he transitions to an epilogue so that he can share his heart with them and help them to understand why he wrote what he did. And he did it not because he didn't love these Christians, but because he did love them, and because his heart was for them.

Tonight, we're going to see three ways in which Paul's heart was for the church. Number one, we're going to see Paul's heart to build the church. Paul had a heart to build the church. Second, we're going to see Paul's heart to serve the church. And then third, we're going to see Paul's heart to partner with the church.

1. Paul's Heart to Build the Church

So, let's look at our first point here, Paul's heart to build the church. Look at verse 14. ["And concerning you, my brethren, I myself am also convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another."](#) (Rom 15:14) Paul now gets personal with this church. Notice what he calls them. They're "my brethren." My brethren. Paul knows the apostolic authority that he has. He understands it, he knows that he has been called specifically by Christ, to be an apostle to go out and to preach the gospel and to plant churches. But Paul is also a humble man, filled with humility. And he puts himself on the same level as those believers in Rome, when he calls them, my brethren.

He recognizes, and he understands that all of them are saved in the exact same manner that Paul was saved through faith in Christ alone. He's a fellow brother to these believers in Rome. And there's some things that he's heard about these believers in Rome, that make him convinced about them.

There's three things that He commends these believers for.

- First, notice what he says there - ["that they are full of goodness"](#) -- they're full of goodness, goodness, here's referring to moral character and living in light of that moral character. They were not good in and of themselves, because we saw that back in chapter 3, right? No one is good, no, not even one. They were not good in and of themselves. But Paul knew that this was a work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, that they are full of goodness, because of what the Spirit was doing in their lives, how the Spirit was working in their lives. Remember the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5? What's one of them that's listed there? Goodness. Goodness is listed there. Because it's what the Spirit does in a believer's life. He produces moral goodness in our lives. They're not good because of what they have done. But they're good because of the Spirit's work in their lives. And they are then doing good works as a result of the salvation just as [Ephesians 2:10](#) says -- that we are saved to do good works, not saved by our good works, but we are saved to then do good works, which Christ is prepared beforehand for us to walk in.
- Second, notice they're also ["filled with all knowledge."](#) This is a doctrinally sound church. Now you look at the book of Romans, and you go, why did he write so much theology to them, then if they're doctrinally sound? Well, because he told us, he's got to remind them of these things. We

need reminders in our lives. But this was a church that was filled with knowledge. But Paul wrote, all the doctrine that he did to these Romans, because he knows that that is what grows the church. It's truth, it's sound doctrine that grows the church. They're a mature church. And they need the truth in their life. And they also need to act it out in their life, because that's what a mature church does.

- Third, they were also "able to admonish one another." That is, they offered counsel to one another, they counseled each other within the church. They had a counseling ministry with one another, and they offered counsel to each other in the church. That word admonish their means to encourage to warn or advise. And this is what they did together as believers, they counseled one another and they encouraged each other to grow in their faith.

Then after commending them, Paul then continues on, and he gives a defense for the boldness of his letter. Look at verse 15. "But I've written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God." (Rom 15:15) Now, what's interesting about the book of Romans is that Paul, never as we've been working our way through the book of Romans, Paul never writes to rebuke or correct the Romans. He never does that. But he does admonish them toward godly living. We've already talked about how bold this letter was.

But notice why he was able to write like that. Notice what it says here, "because of the grace that was given me from God." This is not saving grace that he's talking about here. But this is grace and as an apostle, that he was called to be an apostle, by the grace of God. That is, He didn't earn his apostleship. But it was given to him by Christ Himself. In fact, Paul would have been far from earning apostleship, if you look at the life of Paul before he was saved, and so he understands and realizes that even the apostleship, and the authority that he was given as an apostle, was all by the grace of God.

He was given this grace to authoritatively proclaim the gospel, which is what he says in verse 16, "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:16) Notice he was a minister of Christ. And who was the administer of Christ to? The Gentiles. That was his main focus. That was his main ministry is to go out into preach to the Gentiles. And he did it not literally as a priest, but figuratively, as a priest as he preached the gospel to the Gentiles.

Why did he do it? Why did Paul preach to the Gentiles? Why did he preach the gospel? Because Paul longed to see a multitude of Gentiles saved and offered to God. He was an evangelist, and his heart was for the lost. And he longed to see them saved, and then presented to God -- offered to God to say, "God, here are your children who were saved under my preaching. But God, You did all the work and they're your children. You just used me as a vessel."

And he longed to see a multitude of Gentiles saved and offered to God, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Notice he says that. He wants to see them sanctified. Paul was not content with baby Christians.

Let me read to you a quote that somebody sent to me from a false teacher named Steven Furtick. False Teacher. Here's what he says. "We don't teach from books of the Bible because it gets in the way

of evangelism. We don't offer different kinds of Bible studies because it gets in the way of evangelism. We don't teach doctrine because it gets in the way of evangelism. If you want to be fed God's Word, or have the Bible explained to you, then you are a fat, lazy Christian, and you need to shut up and get to work or you need to leave this church because we only do evangelism."

That's not what Paul says. This man doesn't know the gospel. This man doesn't know God's Word. He's a false teacher. And people are eating all this stuff up. Paul comes in and he says, *"No, you need to be sanctified!"* And how to sanctification happen? Through the preaching of God's Word, through the teaching of God's Word, through you studying God's Word and knowing God's Word and growing in your knowledge of God's Word! Through the renewing of your mind! And that was Paul's heart. He wanted to see the church grow. He wanted them sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

And how does the Holy Spirit sanctify believers? Through His Word! That's how we are sanctified. And that was Paul's heart for these Gentile believers. Paul saw a lot of sanctification happen through his ministry; he saw a lot of it. And Paul had a lot to boast in. He could have boasted in a lot, but he never boasted in himself, but he always boasted in who, in Christ, he always boasted in Christ.

Look at verse 17. He says, *"Therefore, in Christ Jesus, I have found reason for boasting and things pertaining to God."* (Rom 15:17) It was in Christ Jesus, that He could boast not his own human achievements, but in what he had seen Christ do in his church for his people. Look at verse 18. *"For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of Gentiles by word and deed."* (Rom 15:18)

Notice the obedience of the Gentiles here in this verse, what does this mean? It simply means that the Gentiles placed their faith in Christ, not simply that they just lived an obedient life, that they didn't lie anymore, that they didn't steal anymore. Not just that. But that obedience in Christ is that they obeyed the gospel by repenting of their sin and putting their faith in Christ. That's the obedience of Christ. The obedience of the Gentiles.

What did Paul do to give them? The gospel. Notice -- he preached by word and deed. Meaning he proclaimed the gospel, and he lived it out for the Gentiles to see. Even though he preached the gospel, and lived according to the gospel, it was Christ who is accomplishing his work through Paul. And Paul knew that. And so, he boasted in Christ. Paul knew that that was how Christ worked in His church, that He works through the preaching of the Word, because it is the Word of God that is authoritative. Paul was not authoritative in and of himself. But Paul was authoritative because he preached the Word of God, and it's the Word of God that is authoritative in the church.

The preacher doesn't have any authority on his own. Preachers have no authority on their own. The authority that a preacher has comes from the authoritative Word he preaches, which is the Word of God. That's the authority. That's the authority in the church. And so, when that authoritative Word penetrates hearts, and there is fruit because of it, the preacher cannot boast in himself. But the preacher must boast and what Christ has done through His Word. That was Paul's heart -- boast in Christ? And he saw Christ build His Church through the preaching of His Word.

And as verse 19 says, "in the power of signs and wonders in the power of the Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and roundabout as far as Illyricum I have fully preach the gospel of Christ." (Rom 15:19) Notice there... there are signs and wonders that are done through Paul. And we might ask, well, what happened to those? Are those signs and wonders still around today? Answer? No. They're not. Signs and wonders are not. Why? Well, in Paul's day, did he have the complete canon of Scripture? No, he didn't. The New Testament was still being written. He's one of the authors. He's writing it himself. So how was his message then authenticated to those who were listening to him? Answer: through signs and wonders. Signs and wonders. They're the signs of the apostles. But those signs and wonders have ceased because we have the complete canon of Scripture that we hold in our hands.

But what is the greatest miracle of all that's still happening today? Answer: conversion, salvation. That's the greatest miracle of all, people are being saved today. It's the greatest miracle of all, because that is completely and only a supernatural work of God in the heart of a sinner. Do you realize that? Your salvation, you being saved by God was nothing that you did, it was a supernatural work of God in your heart. It's a miracle. That God would take your hard heart, your sinful heart, your heart that has hatred of God, and is at enmity with Him. And He changes that heart so that we would love Him and desire Him and seek to please Him. Only God could do that work. It's a supernatural work. It's a miracle. And that's the miracle that is still happening today. God continues to do this miracle as He builds His church.

And Paul's desire was to preach the gospel and see that happen. Look what he says in verse 20. "And thus I aspire to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I will not build on another man's foundation." (Rom 15:20) Paul preached the gospel to more unreached people than he then did any other apostle. Now, does this mean that he never went into a place where the gospel was already preached? No, he would go to those places, and he would strengthen those churches and continue to preach the gospel. In fact, he's writing to a church here in Rome that was not founded by him. And yet he gives them what? The gospel. He gives them the gospel. But by and large, he went to unreached people, and he preached the gospel, so that he would not build on another man's foundation.

And then there were other men who came and built upon what he had preached. We see this in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I planted, Apollo's watered," but who gave the growth? God did. God is the one who gives the growth. God is the one who grows the seed of the gospel in a person's heart. And Paul knew that. And his heart was to see that happen, because Paul had a heart to build the church.

2. Paul's Heart was to Serve the Church

Second, Paul's heart was to serve the church, he had a heart to serve the church. He says, "For this reason, I have often been prevented from coming to you." (Rom 15:11) For what reason, Paul? Well, for the reason that he had to preach the gospel from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum that we saw back in verse 19. For that reason, because he's going out and preaching the gospel in all these other regions. He says, "then I've been prevented from coming to you." Paul was busy serving the

church by preaching the gospel. And he was so busy that he'd never had a chance to visit the church at Rome. He never made it there.

But now he wants to see this church, and his desire is for them. He's obviously heard a lot about them. And he has a desire also to go and preach the gospel in Spain. And so, Paul's plan was to stop at Rome on his way to Spain to go and preach the gospel. That was his plan. Why did he want to stop in Rome? Look at verse 24. He says, "[Whenever I go to Spain, for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you. When I first enjoyed your company for a while.](#)" (Rom 15:24)

Paul wanted to enjoy the company of these mature believers in Rome to be encouraged and edified by them. But if you remember back to chapter 1:11-12 Paul said this, "[for I longed 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.](#)" (Rom 1:11-12)

Paul didn't want to just go on vacation and relax in Rome. That's not what he wanted to do as he stopped there. But he wanted to go and stop in Rome to do what? To serve them. Because that was his heart. It's possible that he wanted to stop in Rome, and have Rome be his home base on the western side of the empire, just as Antioch was on the eastern side of the empire. That was his home base...in Antioch. But his desire was to visit these believers and to be refreshed by them and enjoy their company as he served them before going to Spain to go and preach the gospel.

But before Paul could go to Rome, and then eventually go over to Spain, he had to make a pit stop in Jerusalem. Look at verse 25. "[But now I'm going to Jerusalem serving the saints.](#)" (Rom 15:25) Paul had to make an 800 mile pit stop in the opposite direction. If you remember, Paul is writing this letter from Corinth. He's writing from Corinth. When he was done with it, he sends it to Rome with Phoebe. We'll look at that next week in Romans 16. But he has to make a trip from Corinth back to Jerusalem. Why? Look at verse 26. "[For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.](#)" (Rom 15:26)

Macedonia and Achaia would be the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth -- and they gave a financial gift to the poor saints in the church in Jerusalem. Now, John Stott calculated out Paul's plan for this journey. And here's how it would have looked: from Corinth, where he's writing this letter, he would have travelled 800 miles by sea to Jerusalem, then from Jerusalem to Rome would be about 1500 miles, and then from Rome to Spain would have been another 700 miles for a grand total of 3000 miles by ship, by sea. That was his plan.

But had Paul gone from Corinth to Spain, and not gone back to Jerusalem? His trip would have been about half of that about 1500 miles. Why would Paul double his trip and put himself in possible dangers out on the sea with these travels? Why would Paul do this? Because he loved to serve the church. His heart was to serve the church. And that's what he's showing these Roman believers.

And so, we planned his trip to Jerusalem. Why? Because the churches in Macedonia and Acadia made a financial donation to them. Look at verse 27. "[Yes, they were pleased to do so, they were indebted to](#)

them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things." (Rom 15:27)

How were the Gentile believers indebted to the saints in Jerusalem? Well, where did the gospel begin? Where was the foundation of the church? The founding, the first church established... in where? In Jerusalem, in Jerusalem. Paul told us that back in verse 19, in Jerusalem, that's where it all started. That's where the church was birthed. And now the gospel has spread to all of these Gentiles all around the world. And these Gentiles are thankful for the church at Jerusalem, sending out missionaries so that they can hear the gospel and be saved. And the least they can do is send a financial gift back to them to show their appreciation.

If fact they know the words of Jesus in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to what receive" (Acts 20:35) and they wanted to show their love for the saints in Jerusalem.

Paul wanted to head to Rome, and to visit them after his trip to Jerusalem, which is why he says in verse 28, "therefore, when I finished this, I have put my seal on this fruit of theirs. I will go on by way of you to Spain. I know that when I come to you all come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ." (Rom 15:28) Paul knows that when he arrives, he is going to be a blessing to these believers in Rome, because he lived a blessed life. Not financially, but spiritually. He lived a spiritually blessed life. How did you live a spiritually blessed life? Because he knew that blessing comes from selfless service to others. That's how you're blessed. That's what his desire was for the church. He was a servant of the church. And he brought great blessing to those that he saw. His desire was to be a blessing to the church, at Rome.

3. Paul's Heart to Partner with the Church

So not only do we see Paul's heart to build the church, of Paul's heart to serve the church, but finally we see Paul's heart to partner with the church. Look at verse 30. "Now, I urge you, brethren, by the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." (Rom 15:30) Now, notice what Paul had just talked about in verses 26 and 27. He just talked about what? Money, a financial gift. He talked about money.

And this would have been the perfect opportunity for Paul to ask for a financial gift from the church in Rome. Oh, you know how the churches in Macedonia care sending a financial gift over to Jerusalem? Well, when I come to Rome, you know what I would love. I'll pass the buckets around, and you just drop it in. You want to partner with this gospel mission? Write here your check to this address. I'll pick it up.

But he doesn't do that. But he does want them to partner with him. Notice what he asked for, he asked for them to partner together with Him in prayer. In prayer. That word "strive together" means to join with someone in a common effort to fight or contend along with. Paul knows the battle the Christian life is. And he knows the spiritual struggles. And he knows that Satan wants to take him out and stop his

missionary work. But notice, he doesn't just ask them to pray for him. But he asked for them to pray "with" him. As both the believers in Rome, and he himself pray to God.

Why? Why would he ask for prayer? Well, obviously is going to be going on a long journey, right? 3000 miles is his plans. Go on a long journey back to Jerusalem, then off to Rome then to Spain. And so, you would think that he would ask for protection on his trip. *"I pray that God would give me a safe trip."* But he doesn't do that. He gives three specific prayer requests in verses 31 and 32.

- First, he says, *"that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea."* (Rom 15:31) Paul knew what lay ahead of him in Jerusalem. In fact, in Acts 20:22, Paul said, *"And now behold, bound by the Spirit, I'm on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me."* (Acts 20:22) Now you would think that Paul would say, well, I'm not going there. But he doesn't do that.

He says, I'm going there. *"Pray for me, that I might be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea."* (Rom 15:31) Who were those? Those are the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, who Paul would have showed up in town and they go, *"Hey, you used to be one of us. What are you doing going around preaching Christ, blasphemy!"* And what would they want to do with Paul then? Kill him! Paul knew that that's what awaited him. So, we asked them to join him in praying for his protection.

- Second, second prayer request, *"and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints."* (Rom 15:31) Paul was concerned that he would cause a dispute in Jerusalem for bringing a gift to the Jews in Jerusalem from Gentile churches. He did not want this financial gift to upset the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, but for them to receive it with gladness and with joy. But he understood the rub between Gentiles and Jews. And so, he says, *"pray for me that that the church of Jerusalem would receive this gift from the Gentiles."* Pray. Why?
- Well, there's a third prayer request in verse 32. *"So that I may come to you enjoy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company."* (Rom 15:32) When Paul experienced joy among these believers in Jerusalem, when they received it, he knew that he would then come to Rome and have joy there as well. But notice what Paul wanted most of all... right in the middle of that verse. He wanted the will of God to be done.

Everything that Paul did, his greatest desire was for the will of God to be done in his life, not his own will, but God's will. Now, Paul gives these three prayer requests.

Closing

And in closing were Paul's prayer requests that the Roman believers joined him in, were those answered by God? Some might say no, because Paul never made it to Rome on his own. How did he make it to Rome? In what? In chains as a prisoner. But let's look at these prayer requests and see if they were.

- First, did God answer his prayer request to be rescued from the disobedient in Judea? Listen to Acts 23:11. "But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also." God saved him from those angry Jews who wanted him dead in Jerusalem, and God promised Paul that he would make it to Rome -- that God answer his prayer request. Yes, he did.
- What about the second one? Did God answer his request that his service would be acceptable to the saints in Jerusalem? Listen to Acts 21:17. "After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18 And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 After he had greeted them, he *began* to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." And listen to this, verse 20. "And when they heard it they *began* glorifying God;" Those saints in Jerusalem, they began to glorify God when they heard what God was doing in the Gentile churches. Saving Gentile believers. They were glad that God answered his request. Yes, he did.
- What about his third one? Did God answer his request to come to Rome in joy by the will of God? Listen, Acts 28 verse 14, "There we found *some* brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome." Now they come into Rome. "And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them," (listen, listen to what he did) "he thanked God and took courage." (Acts 28:14-15) Paul thanked God, and he took courage in Rome, even though he arrived in chains, filled with joy. Did God answer his request? Yes, he did. Although Paul did not arrive in Rome, according to his own plans, he did get there by the will of God. It was all according to God's plan. Because he sought to do the will of God.

God did answer his prayer. He found joy there. Paul had a huge heart for the church, didn't he?

He partnered with the church, and he served the church. And he desired to see the church built. That was Paul's heart. May we learn from him.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for this amazing example of a man who loved You and loved Your church. Father, may we be those who love Your church and serve Your church and partner with Your church and desire to see Your church built. To strengthen us, we know that that happens through Your Word. I pray that You would give us hunger and desire for Your Word to know it and to live it out for Your glory. We thank You for the church that You have built. We thank You for Faith Bible Church, and all that You were doing in and amongst us. You were doing mighty work, and we're so grateful for it. We pray that You would be glorified in all of it. We cannot boast in any of it what we give you all of the glory and all of the praise, and we boast in You and in You alone. Help us to do that and to live this out for Your glory. We pray in Christ's name amen