

Romans 15:22-33 "Paul Plans His Visit To Rome"

Last week we ended with Paul's motivation, given him by the Holy Spirit, which was to be the apostle to the Gentiles which took him to many parts of the world.

We see this in Rom 15:20 "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

It was for precisely for this reason that Paul wasn't able to get to Rome for the refreshment he felt he would find with the saints there. And so he says in Rom 15:22 "This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you."

You, see Paul had always wanted to get to Rome and visit with the saints there, many of whom he knew, either through personal contact or through the testimony of those who were intimate with the different fellowships in Rome.

In fact, we'll see next week that Paul knew quite a few people in Rome and names them by name. Some of the names might surprise you and some might give us insights into the different ministries of the Christians in Rome.

It would seem that Paul's mission given to him by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit had come to an end in the Near East, Asia and parts of Europe. But that doesn't mean that Paul feels it's time to retire. There are still other parts of the world he had not been to and in desiring to go to Rome he sees how God can use the Christians in Rome as a spring-board to Spain.

Rom 15:23-24 "But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, 24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while."

He longed for the fellowship of the Christians in Rome. But fellowship was never an end in itself for Paul. As important as fellowship is, it is used by God to refresh, to build up, to encourage and to always point us to the one who has called us into an eternal fellowship with Himself and that is Christ.

When we see the word fellowship in the N.T. the Greek word used is *koinonia* and it means partnership; social intercourse. It is often

used as a noun when it speaks of the Body of Christ as a fellowship and it's used as a verb in the sense that it's an activity which involves a partnership and social intercourse.

And so, Calvary Chapel Port Charlotte is a fellowship of believers and we also gather together to fellowship with the express purpose of being built up in Christ so that we may better fellowship with our God.

Fellowship is always meant to lead us into a closer relationship with our Savior. In fact, Paul begins his letter to the Christians in Corinth with these words.

1Co 1:9 "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."

But fellowship is not just with the Son but also with the Holy Spirit.

2Co 13:14 "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Of course fellowship is with the Father as well, but it's always based upon the truth of God's word which is what the apostle John could say.

1Jo 1:3 "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

Fellowship, which undermines the truth of God's word, and fellowship apart from the partnership we have with the One true God, lacks the quality of Godly fellowship which builds us up in Christ.

In the church today, many people think of fellowship as merely a cook-out or a gathering of Christian friends just to hang out with. And fellowship could certainly include those things, but it is not the basis for Christian fellowship.

As we look to the very early church just after Pentecost, when the Spirit of God filled His disciples, we see a very interesting thing happen, which included fellowship.

Act 2:42-43 "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."

Their fellowship included, among other things, a sense of worship as they came together to learn of God and grow in His grace. And so, whether we have a cook-out or go bowling together, or whatever other activity we engage in as a Church, we always want to use that time to grow in Christ and minister to one another, to build each other up in the Lord.

And lastly, let me say that fellowship with each other, and most importantly with Christ, should produce lives which desire to be conformed into His image to His glory.

1Jo 1:6-7 "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

You can see that Christian fellowship, as the word of God defines it, is very important and so when Paul desires to have fellowship with the Christians in Rome part of his fellowship involves this aspect, as well as receiving rest.

You might remember in the beginning of this letter Paul tells the Christians in Rome that when he comes he wants to give them something as they fellowship together.

Rom 1:11-12 "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

In a practical way Paul tells the Ephesian church how biblical fellowship will affect our everyday lives.

Eph 5:15-21 "Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

In other words, let your fellowship in Christ simply be an extension of your everyday life which should be characterized by being filled with the Spirit, seeking to please God in everything we do.

There's the tendency to think that we somehow separate fellowship from spiritual things. For example, a church picnic is fellowship. A church service on Sunday morning is worship and spiritual.

No, Paul says whenever you gather, whether on a Sunday morning or a Sunday afternoon around the table with friends, Christian fellowship is to be taking place. And that fellowship involves lifting up Christ in our conversation and in our behavior.

Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that every time we gather for fellowship that we must have a bible in our hands or that we should be singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and being heavy into prayer.

All of that can certainly be Christian fellowship. But it can also be just sitting down with others and enjoying their company as we are there for each in Christ. But, as Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, if our fellowship deteriorates into creating divisions and tearing down instead of building up then it's not Christian fellowship. It's something else.

You and I live in an evil and perverse world just as did the Christians during Paul's time. And so we need each other. But we need the kind of fellowship that will create an environment of trust and love and understanding. And in that environment spiritual gifts and encouragement abound and growth takes place. This was Paul's motivation for coming to the Romans.

Rom 15:23-24 "But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, 24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while."

Paul was also hoping that they would be a part of his ministry to Spain by providing for his needs; emotionally, spiritually and monetarily. God recognizes that we have needs and even in ministry these particular needs shouldn't be over-looked.

And as others participate in Paul's ministry they get to share in the rewards of his ministry. You and I too, as we pray for each other and encourage each other in the work God is doing with us, we get to share in each other's work, at least indirectly.

Now before Paul heads off to Rome he's got some other pressing ministry to attend to.

Rom 15:25-27 "Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings."

Paul is writing this letter to the Romans from Corinth. Corinth was located in the region of Achaia which today would be known as Greece. He was well over a thousand miles from Jerusalem. And yet his commitment to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem was one he would not shirk before going to Rome.

He had taken up a collection from many of the churches in this region of Achaia, as well as Macedonia, which is north of Achaia. And now, he plans to go back to Jerusalem and give them the fruit of the Gentiles' generosity.

One of the reasons he did this was because there were many poor saints in Jerusalem. Many of the Christian Jews were being ostracized by other Jews because of their faith in Christ. They may have lost jobs they had with Jewish employers because they felt these Jews who turned to Christ were traitors to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Also, there were many Jews who were connected with the Temple and its needs. For a Christian Jew to claim Jesus as the Messiah and try to keep his job with the Temple would have been near to impossible.

So, there was great need. Paul was more than happy to meet these needs.

Gal 2:9-10 "James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. 10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do."

And it seems that these Gentiles in Achaia and Macedonia were also happy to meet the needs of fellow believers even though they were Jews.

Rom 15:26 "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."

The word pleased in the Greek is *eudokeo* and it means, to think well of. They thought well of these Jewish brethren. And one of the reasons they thought well of them was because Paul taught them how the Jews were the one's God used to bring the Messiah into the world so that the Gentiles might also have salvation.

This is why Paul goes on to say in Rom 15:27 "They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings."

It's not as though Paul was saying that you can pay the Jews back with money and call it even. No, the intent was to demonstrate that God did call the Jews to Himself and He did use the Jews to bring the Messiah into the world.

And because of God using the Jews Jesus was now being proclaimed to these Gentiles through a Jewish apostle by the name of Paul. He reminds them how great a debt we owe to the Jews from the standpoint that through them we may have eternal life through the Jewish Messiah. Can we not give these Jewish believers a material blessing to show them how much we love them and recognize their faithfulness to Jesus under adverse conditions?

Notice that this collection was not for all Jews in Jerusalem, and it wasn't even for all Christian Jews in Jerusalem, but for the poor saints; those in real need. And the Gentile believers were delighted to do this.

There will be times when we as individuals, and also collectively as a church, will be able to help meet the needs of other saints and as the Lord blesses us we should be delighted to help as the Spirit leads us to those He wants us to minister to.

And so, despite the fact that Paul is over a thousand miles from Jerusalem, he is happy to take this gift to his Jewish brethren who have embraced the same Jesus whom Paul has embraced and who has given them eternal life.

But, he places a priority in his agenda to get to Rome and see his mostly Gentile brethren as soon as possible.

Rom 15:28-29 "So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ."

Pastor Chuck Smith makes the comment, "Paul didn't realize that he'd soon enter Rome as a prisoner, but he did know that he'd come in the fullness of the Gospel of Christ. That's the only way Paul ever traveled!"

And it's true. Paul realized that the Lord would be able to get him to Rome, but it would be the result of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem after the Jews tried to kill him.

In fact, Paul knew the danger he would meet in Jerusalem which is why he asked for prayer from the Roman Christians.

Rom 15:30-32 "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. 31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed."

There are three requests of Paul here:

- 1) Being rescued from the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem;
- 2) accomplishing his task to bring this gift from the Gentile churches to the poor saints in Jerusalem;
- 3) and to be able to come to the Christians in Rome to be refreshed.

Paul had many struggles in front of him in Jerusalem, but he asks the Christians in Rome to join him in his struggle by praying for him.

As I said earlier, we can enter into each other's ministries in different ways and one way is through prayer. Paul understood that prayer is essential for the success of his ministry. But it isn't as though prayer is somehow magical.

When we talk about prayer we're talking about communicating with our Most High God and Savior Jesus Christ. We've all heard the expression, "Prayer changes things." No, prayer itself doesn't change things, God changes things. But He is pleased to change things as we humbly come before Him in prayer.

And we should always realize that it is God Himself who encourages us to pray to Him and to pray according to His will that His will would be revealed, and that He would be glorified in the process.

A church that prays, and individuals who are devoted to prayer, will see God's dynamic movement in their midst. Why? Because prayer is an act of dependence. That's where God wants us, depending and trusting in Him for all things, especially when we don't have the strength to fix the problem or situation by ourselves.

This is why Paul could say in 2Co 12:9-10 "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

God hears His people when we pray and Paul knew that and he wanted as many people approaching the throne of God on his behalf as he could get. Again, not with the idea that with more people we have a better chance of strong-arming God into doing what we want, but with the idea of getting more people involved in the process of depending on God and through prayer God will be glorified when He does answer.

For those who sometimes wonder if God hears and then answers prayer listen to what God says in Isa 59:1 "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear."

This is why we need to be "praying without ceasing" as Paul says in 1Thes.5:17. He knew the importance of constantly communicating with God and communing with the Lord and drawing close to Him.

That's what prayer does. It forces us to draw near to God. And as James says in his epistle, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." (Jam.4:8)

Paul wanted these Christians in Rome to draw near to God on his behalf so that they would know the nearness of God for themselves as well as for Paul, and that God would be pleased to answer their prayers, knowing that the Lord's arm is not so short that it cannot save, nor His ear so dull that He cannot hear.

Prayer is not simply some spiritual exercise, it's an opportunity and a privilege to come before the living God and talk to Him personally about life and His ability to use our lives to honor and glorify Him in His power.

And Paul knew God's power could deliver him from the unbelieving Jews as well as having the power to get him to Rome for the mutual benefit of building each other up in Christ.

I'm sure Paul had no idea that God's will for getting him to Rome would be on a vessel where he would be bound under Roman guard. But, Paul could trust that God still was Sovereign and he was willing to accept what God had for him even though God answered Paul's prayer in a way he didn't expect.

Sometimes the Lord will answer our prayers in a way we don't expect, but that doesn't mean God is out of touch with what is best for our situation. We need to praise Him and trust Him in all things, even when He answers our prayers in unusual ways. He loves us with an everlasting love and only wants our best even when we don't understand what our best is.

Paul then concludes this thought back in our text with the words in Rom 15:33 "The God of peace be with you all. Amen."

This is the God we serve and this is the God who hears and answers our prayers. The God of peace. He has purchased our peace with Himself through the shed blood of Christ and He is working peace in our lives as we humble ourselves before Him.

Peace with God and with one another is essential because it's the hallmark of the fruit of the Spirit. As Christ's peace rules in our hearts we are able to take the message of peace and hope to a dying world who needs to be reconciled to God through Christ.

I'll end with Paul's words to the Colossians as he encourages them to seek Christ.

Col 3:15-17 "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."