

THE BENEDICTION OF BENEDICTIONS
2 Corinthians 13:14

Intro: A benediction is a blessing. Blessings always come from God. We can pray for blessing, but we cannot give a blessing. We may be instruments of blessing, but the blessing itself always has its origin in God. To pronounce a benediction is to seek blessing from God.

Yesterday in the wedding ceremony for Steve Nagai and Susan Uchiyama I closed with two benedictions: one from the OT, and the other from the NT. The one from the OT is found in Num. 6:24-26. Most of us have heard it often, and usually have no trouble in quoting it. It goes like this:

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:

The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Many who teach the Word see in this at least an allusion to the Trinity. And it is important to notice that this benediction is one that the priests of Israel were commanded to use as they sought the blessing of God upon Israel. Just before this benediction in Num. 6, we read these words:

Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them (Num. 6:23).

After that benediction, Moses concluded Numbers, chapter 6, with these words from God:

And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them (Num. 6:27).

So the Lord was saying to the priests, "You pray this prayer, and I assure you that I will answer it. 'I will bless them'!"

However, as Arthur Pink pointed out in his book on the prayers of the Apostle Paul, no such command was given to Paul regarding the benediction which comes at the very end of 2 Corinthians. Paul simply closed the epistle by saying,

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen (2 Cor. 13:14).

There was no preparation for it; it just appeared, and there it was.

But the fact is that this benediction has been used over and over again by the people of God since the day it was written. It is even used in very formal, ritualistic churches where they may not even believe in the Trinity. To quote Arthur Pink again, he called this verse "a confession of the Christian faith and a declaration of Christian privilege" (Glean-

ings from Paul, p. 79). By this he meant that if we use this verse as Paul did, it is a confession that we believe that the Godhead is a Trinity, and that there is blessing for the people of God flowing from "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," and from "the love of God," and from "the communion of the Holy Spirit." We know that it is our privilege as Christians to expect these blessings because after Paul stated what they were, he concluded with, **"be with you all. Amen."**

So it is not enough to know about "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "the love of God," and "the communion of the Holy Spirit," but this is a prayer of benediction asking that we might enjoy these blessings.

Furthermore, when you bring all Three Members of the Godhead together in one prayer, seeking blessing from them, what can we call it but THE BENEDICTION OF BENEDICTIONS. That is, there is no blessing which can possibly surpass these blessings.

In the time that we have today I want to examine each of these statements, to find out what they mean, and then make the application of each to our lives. And so let us start with:

I. "THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST."

Perhaps as you look at this verse you notice something that seems a little strange to you. When we speak of the Members of the Godhead, we usually put God, the Father, first, and then speak of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, and finally, the Holy Spirit. But Paul began with Christ! Why?

Spurgeon was right when he said that we have this order because Paul was concerned about each believer's experience of grace and love and communion (which is fellowship). Doctrinally we put the Father first (as in our Lord's words about baptism in Matt. 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"). The Bible speaks of "the grace of God." In fact, it speaks of the grace of God more than it speaks of the grace of Christ. E.g., Tit. 2:11, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation..." However, we would never have experienced salvation if it had not been for "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." We can only come to God through Christ.

Paul defined "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" earlier in this epistle: chapter 8, verse 9:

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

In a verse we find in Peter's first epistle he spoke of the grace of Christ although he did not use that phrase. I am referring to 1 Pet. 3:18:

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

This was grace, pure grace, grace on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ. We did not deserve what He did for us. We did not ask Him to do it. We were not interested in coming to God, but in grace He came to die for us, made us want God, and then brought us to Him.

In a previous message on Paul's prayers I pointed out to you that many times, as Paul was concluding his epistles, he said this: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." You have it twice in Romans, once in 1 Corinthians. It is in Galatians, Philippians, and several others. It is the grace of Christ which opened the door for us to all of the blessings we have in our salvation, but the point that Paul always made when he spoke of the grace of Christ as he did here, is that we stand in daily need of the grace of Christ. Every day we sin. Every day we fail. Every day we find that our hearts are drawn away from God by the world and all of the things that are in the world. We need the grace of Christ to strengthen us in times of temptation and trial. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." This, too, is found in 2 Corinthians--12:9. What did Paul speak about in his response? He gloried in the realization that "the power of Christ" was resting upon him.

The same grace that saves us, is the grace that keeps us, and strengthens us. True blessing in our lives finds its source in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anyone who reads in the NT about the life of the Apostle Paul cannot help but marvel at his faithfulness to the Lord in the most difficult and trying circumstances. We wonder how a man could endure what he went through. Paul gives us the answer in his last epistle. He was speaking of the harm which Alexander the coppersmith did to him, and he warned Timothy to beware of him. But then Paul wrote this in 2 Tim. 4:16-18:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and

strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever.
Amen.

What was the secret of Paul's faithful and fruitful ministry? It was "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ."

But let us go on to the second:

II. "THE LOVE OF GOD."

This is an interesting request, isn't it? If the grace of Christ is amazing, the love of God is just as amazing. But what did Paul mean by praying that the love of God would be with them? Is it possible that there are times when the love of God is not with us? I thought He loved us with an everlasting love. I thought He set His love upon us even before we knew Him. How is it, then, that we need to be concerned about the love of God being with us?

It seems to me that the Apostle Paul was referring to what the Lord had to say about the love of God when He was with His disciples in the Upper Room. If you wish, you can turn to John 14:21, but if not, listen while I read it to you:

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them,
he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me
shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him,
and will manifest myself to him.

And then our Lord said practically the same thing in verse 23 of the same chapter:

If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my
Father will love him, and we will come unto him,
and make our abode with him.

It is one thing to know that God loves us, but it is quite another thing to be daily conscious of His love. And we can only have that as day by day we seek to be obedient to the Word of God--and for this we need "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." It takes spiritual power to be obedient to God. But, oh, how great and how wonderful are the benefits we receive when we obey the Word of God. Do you know that the fact that God has given us His Word is an evidence of His love for us? But how careful are we to be reading the Word every day not just to learn what God wants us to know, but to find out what He wants us to be, and how He wants us to live? When you and I determine by the grace of God to obey the

Lord, we are going to have a new enjoyment of God's love for us. Paul told the Corinthians in this epistle that it was his ambition in life to be pleasing to the Lord. That meant that his ambition was to be obedient to the Lord, and that in turn drew him into a life of greater enjoyment of God and His love.

To have God's love upon us gives us peace. To have God's love upon us gives us courage. To have God's love upon us makes us humble. But if we are going to experience the blessings of God's love, we must obey the Lord. One thing I have enjoyed about learning verses in Proverbs this year has been the emphasis upon the importance of being obedient to the Lord. We all need to be more careful about this. It is meaningless to talk about how much we love the Lord if we are not being obedient to His Word.

But let me go on:

III. "THE COMMUNION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT."

The King James reads, "the Holy Ghost," but the Holy Spirit is not a ghost as we use the word today. So I prefer to read, the Holy Spirit. Over a hundred years ago Spurgeon called the title, Holy Ghost, weird and ugly, and he recommended that we abandon it entirely, especially when the Greek word is Spirit!

"Communion," as I have said, is fellowship. The NASB renders this phrase, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The NKJV and the NIV do the same.

The word fellowship is a word which I am afraid not many Christians really understand. We call it fellowship when we as Christians get together when we may spend practically no time talking about the Lord. We may talk about politics, or sports, or some recent news event, or our families, or any number of other subjects, but we are having Christian fellowship when we are talking about the Lord--Who He is, what He has done for us, how He is working in our lives. We have fellowship when you share with me what you know about the Lord, and when I can profit in my life from what you are telling me--and vice versa. A true Christian never tires of talking about the Lord, never tires of hearing about the Lord. Fellowship means spiritual growth and blessing.

Now Paul was concerned about the Corinthian church and her need for fellowship with the Holy Spirit. We learn from 1 Corinthians that one great area of neglect in the Corinthian church was the ministry of the Spirit. As a result they were stunted in their spiritual growth. They needed to

experience real fellowship in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit communes with us. But what does He communicate to us?

Please turn to John 14 where we will find some answers to our questions about "the communion of the Holy Spirit."

In John 14:26 we read these words:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.**

The Holy Spirit draws special attention to the words of Christ. He wants us to understand what the Lord taught while He was here on earth. So we see immediately that the Holy Spirit focuses attention upon the Word.

Look at two more verses: John 15:26, 27

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, **he shall testify of me:**

And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

— The Holy Spirit loves to talk to us about Christ. If you and I are Spirit-taught, we are going to be learning more about our Lord, and what we are learning will make a big difference in the way we live.

Look at four verses in John 16--verses 12-15:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, **he will guide you into all truth:** for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that **he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.**

— The communing that the Holy Spirit does with us is in the Word. He teaches us the Word--all of it. He speaks of Christ, and teaches us what He has said. In fact, He is listening to Christ, and then telling us what the Lord wants us to know. This is fellowship. This is what happens when we are participating in what the Holy Spirit wants us to see

and understand. When you read your Bible do you ask the Lord to show you what He wants you to see, and to help you to understand what He wants you to know? OR ARE YOU READING YOUR BIBLE? If you are not reading your Bible, you do not know much about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Concl: You see, when Paul prayed this prayer of benediction for the Corinthian church, he was touching upon the things which were really the most vital in their relationship with the Lord. I hope that when I use these verses to dismiss you, it will not be a mere formality, but the true prayer of my heart, that you will really experience more of the grace of Christ, and more of the love of God, and more of the daily fellowship that we need with the Holy Spirit as He guides us into the truth of the Word, speaking to us of Christ, showing us His glory, and explaining to us the things that the Lord had to say when He was here on earth.

If we are enjoying these ministries of the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, not only will we be loving the Lord more each day, but our fellowship with each other will become more of a delight to us, and our testimony in the world will be more greatly blessed of God in awakening others to their need of our glorious and sovereign triune God.

GLORY TO GOD FOR CHRIST

Galatians 1:3-5

Intro: When I began this series on the Prayers of the Apostle Paul in the epistle of Paul to the church at Thessalonica, we noticed a real enthusiasm on Paul's part for what had taken place in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica. His heart was filled with thanksgiving to God for them. Cf. 1 Thess. 1:2-4. The same enthusiasm carries through chapter 1.

The same is true of Paul's second letter to that same church. Cf. 2 Thess. 1:3-5.

In 1 Corinthians Paul expressed his thanksgiving to God for them, but it was different from his letters to the church at Thessalonica. His rebuke of the church began in verse 11 of chapter 1, and continued on through the rest of the epistle.

The tone of 2 Corinthians was better, but it still did not measure up to 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul gave no expression of his thanksgiving to God for them. He did mention that they had helped him by their prayers, but it still did not measure up to 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Today I want to take up Paul's prayers in his letter to the churches of Galatia, but we won't be spending a lot of time here because there are only two prayers: the first in chapter 1, verses 3-5; the second is the last verse of the epistle where we find Paul's usual conclusion: "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." But there is no word of thanksgiving. Paul did not forget to be gracious, but he used stronger language in this epistle than in any of his other epistles. He was deeply concerned about what had taken place in the churches of Galatia.

Let me read several passages to you from this letter:

- 1) Gal. 1:6-9.
- 2) Gal. 3:1-5.
- 3) Gal. 4:8-20.
- 4) Gal. 5:1-15.
- 5) Gal. 6:11-17.

You can easily see how greatly concerned Paul was about the situation among the Galatian churches, and why we have no

expression of thanksgiving to God for conditions as they were.

But does this mean that prayer, therefore, is eliminated--especially a prayer of thanksgiving? If you look at the three verses which will be our text for today, you will discover that the answer is, No, prayer can never be eliminated. Thanksgiving is never eliminated. Whenever we can thank God for His people and what is going on in their lives, we can always be thankful to God for the Lord Jesus Christ! That is the reason I have taken as my subject, **GLORY TO GOD FOR CHRIST**. In fact, the worse things may be among the Lord's people at any time, the greater the reason we have to thank God that He is the God that He is, and to thank God for sending His Son into the world. This is the theme of this short prayer in Galatians 1.

But now let us look at verses 3 through 5 in chapter 1. We begin with:

I. THE APOSTLE'S GREETING (Gal. 1:3).

There certainly was no church that was in greater need than the churches of Galatia. Galatia was a Roman province. In Nelson's Bible Dictionary we find this information about Galatia. It was::
a region in central Asia Minor (modern Turkey) bounded on the east by Cappadocia, on the west by Asia, on the south by Pamphylia and Cilicia, and on the north by Bithynia and Pontus (see Map 7, D-2). The northern part of the region was settled in the third century B. C. by Celtic tribes that had been driven out of Gaul (France). From these tribes, the region derived its name, Galatia (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary).

On Paul's first missionary journey he and Barnabas evangelized most of Galatia, and then he revisited the Galatian churches on his second and third journeys. Some of the cities in this area were Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra (where Paul was stoned), and Derbe. In these places Jewish teachers of the Law had come in and were teaching the necessity of circumcision, and, in general, obedience to the whole Law as necessary for salvation. This amounted to a contradiction of salvation by grace, which was, as Paul said in chapter 1, "another Gospel," which was really not a Gospel at all. It is clear that fellowship had been adversely

— affected, and that there was very little evidence among the people of either grace or peace. The people needed to be turned away from their own efforts to see again the sufficiency of what God had done for them in Christ. And so we can be sure that Paul prayed this prayer of greeting with all of the fervor and devotion for God that he had in his heart. In fact, it would only have been because of God's grace and the possibility of God's peace that he would have had any hope that conditions in the Galatian churches could be changed. The Judaizers were legalists, and a legalist is one who believes that he has to earn the blessing of God by what he does. The people of the churches in Galatia needed to have their hearts turned to God and to Christ, remembering what They had done for the salvation of sinners.

Verse 4 has to do with:

II. THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS (Gal. 1:4).

We have three things that Paul mentioned, and each part of verse 4 was desperately needed in the minds and hearts of the believers in the Galatian churches:

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- 1) What Christ did.
 - 2) What His purpose was.
 - 3) Why He did it.

What did Christ do? He "gave Himself for our sins."

What was His purpose? "That he might deliver us from this present evil world," or age.

Why did He do it? It was "according to the will of God and our Father," or God, even our Father.

Verse 5 is the verse which proves that Paul's prayer, which began in verse 3, includes verse 4.

A. What Christ did (v. 4a).

— Paul brought the Galatians immediately to the Cross where the Lord Jesus died. Legalists always overlook the real significance of the death of Christ. Legalists are falsely trying to do what Christ has already done, and which actually no person is able to do for

himself or herself. He did not deserve to die. He died as a Substitute for His people. He took upon Himself the full penalty of our sins. His death fully met our obligation to God. There is nothing that needs to be added to what He did; there is nothing that can be added. And He did what He did voluntarily, suffering as no one has ever suffered. We have His own words in John 10:18 to the effect that no one took His life from Him. Judas did not take our Lord's life from Him — although in betraying the Lord he committed a crime for which he would be held chargeable. Pilate did not take it (although he delivered the Lord over to be crucified). The Jews did not take His life from Him — although they were fully accountable to God for what they did. The Roman soldiers who actually crucified Him did not take His life from Him. "He gave Himself"! He was in complete control of all of the circumstances which led to His death, but He laid down His own life.

This wonderful truth is emphasized in John 10:11:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

And in this connection, I love to think of what Solomon wrote in Ecc. 3:14:

I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

The Lord left nothing undone that needed to be done to put away our sins, and there will never be the need for another sacrifice like the one He made on the Cross. In the words of Heb. 10:12, our Lord "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever." And in Hebrews 9 we read these words:

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:
Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;
For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.
And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:24-28).

He voluntarily gave Himself, did a perfect work which will never need to be repeated.

Now let us go on to consider:

B. What His purpose was (v. 4m).

It is stated in the middle of verse 4: "That he might deliver us from this present evil world," or this present evil age. Our Lord was on a rescue mission.

Cf. Gal. 6:14.

One statement about the Cross cannot say it all. Our Lord was accomplishing many things when He died for us on the Cross. He rescue us from the penalty of our sins. He rescued us from the dominion of our sins, as Jerry Bridges stated it in his new book. The Lord also rescued us from this present evil age. The word "age" considers the world from the standpoint of time. The world is not any worse today than it always has been; we are just seeing more of the evidence of how "evil" it is!

Paul stated it this way in his epistle to the Colossian church:

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:
Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:
In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:12-14).

Everything about this world in which we live is evil. Paul was not speaking about the earth; he was speaking about the character of life on this earth. The world's wisdom is corrupt. Its pleasures are corrupt. The effect of the world upon the lives of people is harmful. It is degenerate, lewd, bad. The Devil is the god of this world, and he earnestly seeks the eternal damnation of every person who has ever lived, or ever will live, in this sinful atmosphere in which we all live. Martin Luther said about this world, "There is nothing in it but ignorance, contempt, blasphemy, hatred of God and disobedience against all the words and works of God" (Luther, Martin, A Commentary of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, p. 54). It seems like people are getting more blasphemous every day. This past

week I drove behind a car which had a bumper sticker which said, "Goddess bless." It is a part of the wicked move on the part of many to make God feminine.

Our blessed Lord by His death has rescued us from the world. The bondage we were under has been broken. We are still in the world, but we are not of the world, and it was, and still is, the prayer of our Lord that we would be kept from the Evil One. Today when people's lives are being ruined forever, we are rescued, and we have the privilege of telling people in this present evil age that the One Who rescued us, will rescue them if they will only turn to Him for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life.

But why did the Lord do this?

C. Why He did it (v. 4b).

Was it because we asked Him to do it for us? No! Was it because we deserved such a rescue? No! Was it because God saw something good in us worthy saving? No! There is no one good enough for God. What our Lord Jesus Christ did was **"according to the will of God and our Father."**

The basic reason for the Cross is to be found in God. It was His will, His love, His grace, His mercy, His wisdom — our salvation originated with God before time was. He had every right to forget us and let us be ruined by this world, but instead He set His love upon us even though it meant the sacrifice of His own and only beloved Son. Paul said it this way:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8).

Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary!

After reading all of this, if there is any grace in your heart at all, I

am sure that you would feel like Paul did as he was writing. Let us call it,

III. PAUL'S DOXOLOGY (Gal. 1:5).

No amount of service could repay God. We don't have enough money to properly express our gratitude. All of the wealth of this world would not even make a down payment on such a salvation as we have in Christ. But there is one thing we can all do, and one thing that we always should do. Even when things are as bad as they were in Galatia, the one thing that we all need to do is to give our heavenly Father glory, glory, glory, for the gift of His Son, our Redeemer and our Lord! We can always praise God for the Lord Jesus Christ!

Concl: How long has it been since you said something like this —
"To Him be glory for ever and ever."

What a prayer this is! Under the influence of the Jewish teachers of the Law the Galatian churches had lost sight of the sufficiency of Christ for our salvation, and for our daily living, and for all eternity! Let us not be guilty of such ingratitude. But every day we live, even when overwhelmed with troubles of various kinds, it will also be good for our souls to go to the Father even if all we can say is, "Thank you, Father, for the Lord Jesus Christ."

And if you are one who is still without Christ, may it please God to draw you to Christ. And may you seek the Lord while He may be found, and may you call upon Him while He is near. Forsake the way that leads to eternal destruction, and turn to Christ. His promise is that He will never turn away any who seek Him for His grace and for His salvation.

A PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

Romans 1:7-13

Intro: When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church at Rome he had never been to Rome. And so we know that he did not found the church at Rome. How it was founded, we do not know. It is possible that some of the Jews who were in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost following the death of our Lord, were saved, and went back to Rome to establish the church there. But it is also possible, as Griffith Thomas said in his commentary on Romans, that "the close and frequent communication between Palestine and Rome through Asia Minor and Greece would easily give the opportunity for Christianity to reach the metropolis of the Empire" (p. 17). And so we can't set a date for the beginning of the church in Rome, but it is thought that Paul wrote about 56 or 57 A.D. Therefore, the church could not have been more than twenty years old, and probably was more like ten years old.

From the fact that Paul wrote such a long letter to them, giving the most complete teaching on the doctrine of salvation that we have in the NT, we must assume that the church was in need of teaching. There is no suggestion that Paul was correcting error (as was the case with his epistle to the Galatians), but he wanted to make sure that they did understand the great doctrines of condemnation, justification, sanctification, and glorification, as well as some of the basic truths regarding the life that the people of God should be living.

Our main concern today is Paul's prayer in chapter 1. It begins with his usual greeting in the latter part of verse 7, and then continues down through verse 12, and even into verse 13. Let me begin with just a word of introduction about Paul's customary greeting in verse 7b.

I. PAUL'S CUSTOMARY GREETING (Rom. 1:7b).

Griffith Thomas had this to say about these familiar words:

These two words sum up the whole of the Gospel.

Grace is the cause and Peace is the effect (p. 48).

However, the need for grace and peace does not stop when a person is first saved. It continues on throughout life, day after day. It is by God's grace that He is so patient with us. It is by God's grace that He forgives us when we fail. It is by God's grace that we are strengthened against temptation and sin. It is by God's grace that He blesses our work. We need and experience the grace of God every day. And it is

through His grace that we experience His peace. Peace comes through loving the Word. See Psa. 119:165. Peace comes through prayer. Cf. Phil. 4:6, 7. Peace comes as we keep our minds focuses upon the Lord. Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4. Let us never tire of reading this greeting in the epistles of the NT. May they always encourage us to draw more heavily upon the resources that we have in the Lord.

"Grace and peace" come from God *our* Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. So there is no way that we can ever exhaust the supply. And let us not fail to pray this prayer for ourselves, and for each other. Husbands and wives need to pray this prayer for one another. Parents need to pray this prayer for their children. Pray this for every person on your prayer list. Pray this for every servant of the Lord you know. I know of two pastors who are going through deep trouble right now with their congregations, and what they need more than anything else is "grace...and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

II. PAUL'S THANKSGIVING (Rom. 1:8, 9).

Please don't get tired of reading about Paul's thanksgiving. It was a major part of his life, and you and I would have realized it if we had known him, and been with him. Everywhere he turned he saw reasons for lifting his heart in thanksgiving to God.

Notice something here about his thanksgiving. He offered it to God, and he offered it through the Lord Jesus Christ. What does this tell us? It tells us that even our praise cannot be acceptable to God unless we offer it "through Jesus Christ."

We find this same thought in Heb. 13:15:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Our praise is not acceptable to God if it is not offering through the merit which we have in Christ. Christ is the One and the only One through Whom we have access to the Father. And so our praise must be offered in His Name.

What was Paul thankful for?

He was thankful that the testimony of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ had reached out to "the whole world." This has to mean, throughout the whole Roman world, i.e., the whole Roman empire. It

was well-known throughout the Empire that there was a church in Rome, a true church, a group of people who knew and loved God and the Lord Jesus Christ — and who worshiped them! Paul was not concerned about who started the church, or how long it had been going, nor even how many were in the church. It was the clear testimony of their faith that brought joy to his heart and praise to God from his lips.

Such news about any church would have delighted the heart of the Apostle Paul, but notice why it was such a special source of joy to him. Read verse 9. (Read.)

Now think about this for a moment. This was a church that Paul had never visited. Chapter 16 of Romans tells us that he knew people in the church, but that must have been because he had met them in other places. But Paul could say to them, taking God as His witness, that day by day he had mentioned them "without ceasing" in his prayers!

It is remarkable if you can say this about your family, or about your fellow-believers at Trinity. But to be able to say it about believers you have never met, and never visited, is truly remarkable! This did not mean that Paul prayed for them incessantly, but that, whenever he prayed, he prayed for them. The Roman church was not alone in this. Paul said the same thing to the Thessalonians. Cf. 1 Thess. 1:2, 3. He also said this in Eph. 1:16, in Phil. 1:3, 4, in Col. 1:9, and Philemon 4. Paul was a man of much prayer, and a man of many thanksgivings.

But the point that I would like to make is that we always enjoy seeing God's blessing on others, or even hearing about it, if we have been faithful in seeking such blessing upon His people! In this connection let me remind you again of our Lord's words in John 16:24:

Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, **that your joy may be full.**

When you have been interceding for others, perhaps for years, and then see His blessing upon them, not only will you rejoice more than others who have not prayed, but you will thank God that He has made you an instrument through whom He has brought blessing in answer to prayer. Remember that Paul told the Corinthians that they had helped him by prayer. He did not mean that they had met his needs, but that God had heard and answered their prayers.

But there is a third part to our text that we need to notice. It is:

III. PAUL'S REQUEST (Rom. 1:10-13).

Paul's thanksgiving had always been accompanied by a special request: He wanted to go to Rome to see the believers there. But there was much more on Paul's mind than just the possibility of going to Rome. Before we get to the details, notice in verse 10 how he expressed his requests.

There are two expressions in verse 10 which show that Paul had been praying about this for a long time. The first is in the words "making request," indicating that he had made it over and over, and was still praying about the possibility. The second is in the words "at length." They mean after such a long time.

Paul had to wait for answers to prayer just like we do, and the delays did not keep him from bringing the same requests to the Lord over and over again.

"If by any means" showed Paul's submission to the Lord regarding the means God might use for getting him to Rome. I doubt if he even suspected that it might be as it eventually was — as a prisoner of Rome! But he left the way up to the Lord. This is apparent also in his words, "by the will of God." As much as Paul wanted to go to Rome, he didn't want to go until the Lord was ready for him to go.

"Now" shows that he was daily expecting the Lord to do something about his request. And the "prosperous journey" to which he referred was simply the answer to his prayer, that he, as the NKJV renders it, would find a way for visiting them.

Perhaps the assurance that God was going to answer his prayer grew out of his reason for wanting to go to Rome. It was not just to see the city — although that probably would have been just as exciting for him as it would be for us. No, his reason for wanting to go was entirely in line with the work that the Lord had called him to do.

Paul wanted to "impart" unto them "some spiritual gift." What did he mean by this?

"Impart" is a word which we could translated, to share. The idea is that Paul wanted to come to them to share a gift with them while still keeping it for himself. You know, we can do this in our ministry to each other. This is what every Bible teacher, every pastor, should always seek to do. This is what you parents do with your children. God gives you a blessing. He teaches you some truth. You share it

with others without losing it yourself. In fact, it is in sharing it with others that it is enriched in your own heart. That is why we often say that the teacher usually gets the most out of his teaching. In giving it to others, the truth means more to him, or to her.

The term "spiritual gift" can mean the spiritual gifts which Paul discussed in his first letter to the church at Corinth. But it is doubtful if that were his meaning here. Instead he was speaking of spiritual knowledge which would strengthen them and lead to their being more established in their relationship with the Lord. Paul wanted to contribute to their spiritual growth, to make them stronger in the Lord as a result of his time with them.

How was he going to do this? It would be by teaching them, teaching them the truth of God. And it is very likely that this epistle was written just in case it might never be the Lord's will for Paul to go there in person. And by his writing, we can profit from Paul's ministry today, almost 2,000 years later.

We have the advantage of being with each other every week, and, for many of us, it means several times a week. The main reason for our getting together today as we are is so those of us who teach can impart to others some spiritual gift so that we all can be more firmly established in our knowledge of the truth and in our fellowship with the Lord.

But this imparting is not just for those of us who stand before the rest of you and teach. It is for all of us. Remember: In our conversation with each other we ought always to seek to be a blessing in some way to those to whom we speak. Christian fellowship is the result of talking about the Lord, and it is very difficult to talk about the Lord without talking about His Word.

But we are not finished with Paul's request. Look with me at verse 12.

Paul not only wanted to be a blessing, and to be a means of blessing to others, but he wanted to receive blessing. I have told you many times that blessings go both ways, from the teacher to the one being taught, and from the one being taught to the teachers. Paul said here in verse 12, "That **I** may be comforted together **with you** by the mutual faith both of you and me."

What does it mean to "be comforted"? It means to be encouraged, to

be strengthened, to be exhorted, to be taught. And Paul attached a prefix to this verb to indicate that he would benefit from his time with them just as much as they would.

I don't know how Paul could possibly have described the fellowship of the church in any better way than he did here. Perhaps this is why he felt so strongly that somehow, at some time, God was going to answer this long-standing prayer. There can be no doubt about it: Paul was praying according to the will of God.

But there is a final word which has to do with his prayer, and it is in verse 13.

Many times Paul had made his plans to go to Rome, but he had been hindered ("let hitherto"). He told them in Rom. 15:20-24 what the hindrance was:

20 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation:

21 But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.

22 For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.

23 But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you;

24 Whosoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.

Paul's calling was to preach the Gospel where people had not heard of the Savior, and as long as there was such a place in the Empire, that had the greatest priority with him.

But notice how he stated the final part of his request in Rom. 1:13. He wanted to have "some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles." Paul was thinking here about people in Rome, particularly Gentiles, but not excluding Jews, who did not know the Lord. He had been praying that he would not only edify the saints in Rome, but he was hoping and praying also that he would be able to lead others to the Savior. It is so easy for us to settle down to enjoy the fellowship that we have in the Lord, but to forget that there are people around us every

day who do not know the Lord, and who need to be reached with the Gospel.

Conc: Now we have completed the study of another of Paul's prayers.

Does it reflect the way you and I pray? Do we have the same burden for the Lord's people that Paul had? And are we concerned about people in the world who are without Christ, as Paul was concerned? Does Paul's prayer indicate the burden that we have for our ministry here as Trinity Bible Church?

If not, it certainly should. We would not pray like Paul did hoping that we could go to Rome, but we need to be praying this prayer for our church, for our families, and for people the Lord may be please to use us to reach all through this greater metropolitan area in which we live. We have a ministry to each other, but we have a ministry also to the world about us. And what better place to catch a vision for such a ministry than right at the Lord's Table today. As we remember Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to be thinking about ourselves and our needs, but remembering also that there are still "other sheep" who must be reached, and the Lord has some for each of us to reach with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God burden us like He had burdened the heart of the Apostle Paul.

PAUL'S HEART'S DESIRE AND PRAYER

Romans 10:1-4

Intro: One common criticism that is often leveled at the doctrines of grace, and the doctrine of election in particular, is that if you believe in election, you won't pray for the salvation of lost people, nor will you witness. The idea of those who say this is that if God has chosen those who are going to be saved, then He will do it all, and there is nothing for us to do. This prayer of the Apostle Paul shows that such a criticism is not only not justified, but it is contrary to the truth of Scripture.

But let us notice, first, what Paul's request was. (Read Rom. 10:1.)

Now let us notice what Paul wrote about Israel in chapter 9. Look with me at verse 6 of chapter 9. Paul had just stated many of the blessings that God had given to the nation Israel, but then he felt compelled to explain why not all Jews are saved. In verse 6 he said that it is not because the Word of God is ineffective, but, as Paul went on to explain, it is because God never intended to save every Jew. Let me read beginning with verse 6, going down through verse 13. (Explain.)

God has seen fit to deal with the Jews as He deals with the Gentiles. He has chosen to save some, but not to save all. He saved Isaac, but He did not save Ishmael. He saved Jacob, but He did not save Esau. And so it goes on and on through human history.

If you go on reading in chapter 9 following verse 13 you can see that going over to the Gentiles, God not save Pharaoh (a Gentile), but He did save Moses (a Jew). But God, even in OT times, did save some Gentiles. He has saved most of us who are here today, and we are Gentiles. But He has not saved every Gentile.

The explanation for all of this is given in verse 11 of chapter 9. (Read.) Paul speaks of "the purpose of God according to election" standing! That is, what God determined before the foundation of the world to do, He is doing! He chose to save some, but He did not choose to save all. He had the right to save everybody, or to save nobody, but He chose to save some, but not all. And this is what has been happening in every generation since the beginning of time. He is saving His elect, His chosen ones!

We have to learn to accept what the Word of God teaches about salvation, and not reject a doctrine just because it does not seem right to us that God

would do as He has done.

But now let me take you to chapter 11 and verse 25. And here I want to read down through verse 29.

The statement that I want you to notice is the one at the beginning of verse 26: **"And so all Israel shall be saved."**

If you have read Romans from the beginning, this expression ought to remind you that Paul said in chapter 9, verse 6b, "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." Paul meant by this, as we have seen, that sometimes the name "Israel" is used, not of the whole nation, but of a select group within the nation. Just because a person is Jewish by birth does not mean that he is going to be saved. He may be, or he may not be. What we do know is that those who have been chosen by God to be saved from among the Jews, will most certainly be saved. All of the elect will be saved — all of the elect Jews, and all of the elect Gentiles. Therefore, when Paul said, "And so all Israel shall be saved," he did not mean that every Jew would be saved, but that all of the elect of Israel would be saved.

— You can't read Paul's epistles without realizing that the doctrine of election was not only taught by Paul, but it was very precious to him. He believed that God would do what was right, and he praised God for His work of salvation. We all should know that God being God, absolutely sovereign in His power, could have saved everyone IF that had been His will. But since that is not happening, it is not a sign that man is greater than God and can successfully resist God; it is proof that God is actually doing what He planned to do before the foundation of the world.

And so I come back to what I said in the beginning: This is why some people say, "God has chosen His ~~election~~. He has guaranteed their salvation. So why do we need to pray for the lost, and why we do we need to witness to them?

I'll tell you why. We witness because the Lord Jesus told us to witness. Acts 1:8 is an example of what the Lord said about this. We do not have many examples of prayer for the lost in Scripture, but we do have these words from our Lord in Matt. 9:37, 38:

— 37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

38 **Pray ye** therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

So we are to pray, and we are to witness. This is just as much a part of His plan as is the fact that He has chosen those who are going to be saved.

— We don't have a greater example in the NT of ~~one~~^{those} who witnessed and of those who prayed, than the Apostle Paul. And today I want us to see not only the fact that he prayed, but the fervency, the depth, of His prayers for Israel.

Look at Rom. 10:2. (Read.)

I. PAUL'S HEART'S DESIRE AND PRAYER (Rom. 10:1).

Paul undoubtedly grieved for His people because they were suffering under the heel of the Roman government. However, to him their greatest need was not to be delivered from Rome, but to be saved from their sins! And, in the light of what Paul had said about Israel, he had to be thinking about the elect of God, those who had been chosen by God to be saved. He did not know who they were anymore than we do, but He knew that God knew, and so this was a major burden that Paul had in prayer.

— He spoke here of his "heart's desire." This speaks of that which would give him the greatest pleasure. Paul was expressing what he longed to see. It was that which would bring him the greatest pleasure. And the fact that he called it his heart's desire was an indication that it was genuine! He was not just trying to impress the Roman believers (who were probably Gentiles for the most part), but he was speaking from his heart. He meant every word that he was saying.

But, you know, sometimes we have good things that we desire, things that we desire for others, but we don't pray for them! Paul took his desires to God in prayer. This was obviously a God-given desire. And Paul prayed with the fervency that he would have it the salvation of Jews depended upon his faithfulness in prayer.

But there is more that we can say about his praying for Israel. We have to go back to chapter 9 for this. Here we find some of the most amazing words you will find anywhere in Scripture. I want to read verses 1 through 3. You can tell that something very important is coming — something which needed confirmation. (Read.)

— Remember that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. He was commissioned by God to take the Gospel to the people he had formerly despised. And we know how tirelessly he worked to make sure that every Gentile in

the Roman Empire would hear of Christ! But even with all of that on his heart, his still carried a tremendous burden for Jewish unbelievers. In fact, in all of my years in the Lord's work, I have never heard any person say what the Apostle Paul said here. We are not talking here about a man with a superficial understanding of the Gospel, but Paul probably knew the Gospel better than any man in his generation. Yet he was willing to give up all that he had in Christ if God would only save the people of Israel. Paul said that his conscience was clear in making such a claim, and that the Holy Spirit was his witness that this is the way he really felt in his heart.

"Great heaviness and continual sorrow" — Paul's soul was in pain; his grief over the people of Israel was unceasing. He found no relief for this. It was with him day and night. Paul experienced feelings similar to what Jacob had when he lost Joseph, and thought that Joseph had been devoured by some wild animal. Listen to what we read about Jacob in Gen.

37:34, 35:

34 And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

35 And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

This was a burden the Apostle Paul could never get away from.

Perhaps we can see more clearly Paul's burden when we remember what he knew about Christ as the Gospel. He knew what it meant to be forgiven of his sins. He knew the sanctifying work of the Spirit in his soul. He looked forward with great joy to the coming of the Lord. But his point here was that he would give up Christ, would give up all that was included in his salvation, and once again put himself under the judgment of God, the eternal judgment, if only the Lord would redeem his "brethren," his "kinsmen according to the flesh."

Can you think how terrible it would be if you could suddenly be lost again, and lose Christ and what you have in Him. It is hard to believe that Paul could say anything like this. Of course, he couldn't give up his salvation, but he was giving us a statement which really describes how he felt. I believe he was sincere, and I hope you believe him, too.

But what was there about the Jews that made his pain so intense, so much so that he could find no relief from it? Let us go back to our text and we will see.

II. THE REASON FOR HIS GRIEF (Rom. 10:2-4).

— Paul was willing to give them credit where they deserved it. He said here that "they have a zeal of God." That is, they were concerned about God and their relationship to Him. And that is commendable. And their concern had reached the point of "zeal." The NIV translates this expression, "They are zealous for God." They wanted to please Him. They wanted to be accepted by Him. They observed the Sabbath. They tithed. They observed days and months and times and years. They were trying to keep the Law. But the problem was that they were not acting on the truth. They were ignorant of the way of righteousness. Instead of learning of God's provision of righteousness, they were seeking to earn their own. And what they were doing trying to gain acceptance with God was so important to them that when someone tried to tell them the truth, they treated the messenger as a heretic. They refused to submit themselves unto God's righteousness.

Most of them had probably never heard what Isaiah had written seven or eight hundred years before:

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away (Isa. 64:6).

— They did not know what Paul wrote to Titus in Tit. 3:5-7:

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

It might be commendable to be religious, but religion will not save anyone. It is commendable to be sincere and zeal, but they will not save anyone. We must know the truth. We must know God's way. And Paul stated that in verse 4:

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

— Man stands condemned before the Law; Christ has satisfied its demands, taking the punishment upon Himself which the people of God deserved. And so it becomes clear when we understand the truth that Christ is the Savior. The Law never saved anyone. And it never sanctifies anyone. Paul stated the truth very clear earlier in Romans when he said these words in chapter 8, verses 3 and 4:

3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:
4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Paul began the writing of this epistle pointing out the only hope for our salvation:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

Conc: What must be the experience of people who have sincerely sought to please God without any real satisfaction that they were doing the right thing, nor that they were doing enough, only to find out when they die that their works are abominable to God, and that they are doomed to hell for all eternity? This is why Paul was so concerned. Only God could have given him the burden he had to see his fellow Israelites saved. How wonderful it would be if even a portion of his burden were to fall upon us. No matter how a person may be trying to earn salvation, there is only one way — and that is through Christ and His death on the Cross. Let it be our heart's desire and our prayer that people will be saved.

Perhaps there are some here today who are zealous for God, but actually you are wasting your time, headed in the wrong direction. I trust that the Lord will use His Word to open your hearts that you may see that you can never earn your salvation, but that salvation is a free gift to all who come to place their trust in Christ. Put your trust in Him, and in Him alone today, and be saved.

"LOST IN WONDER, LOVE, AND PRAISE"

Romans 11:33-36

Intro: Perhaps you have notice that my subject for today has been taken from a well-known hymn. As I was thinking of a subject, these words came into my mind, but I could not remember what hymn it was from. So I took our Trinity Hymnal, and started to look for it. I would be very glad if someone would publish a concordance for hymns. It would save me a lot of time every once in while.

Anyway, after several minutes of looking I came to the hymn, #460 in our Hymnal, and there were the words that I wanted, at the end of the last verse. The hymn was Love Divine, All Love's Excelling. The last verse reads like this:

Finish, then, Thy new creation; Pure and spotless let it be:
Let us see Thy great salvation Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory, Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee, *Lost in wonder, love, and praise.*

This last verse has to do with heaven, and I am sure that when we get there and experience the completion of God's saving work in us, we will all be "lost in wonder, love, and praise." I am sure that Charles Wesley was right about that. But the prayer that we are going to consider today shows that there are times even here on earth when it is possible for the child of God to be "lost in wonder, love, and praise." I think that those words describe the Apostle Paul's condition when he uttered this doxology of praise to the Lord. He had been contemplating the wonders of our salvation, how the Lord meets us in our sin, declares us just through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then works throughout our lives to sanctify us, leading to our complete glorification. That took him through the first eight chapters. Then in chapters 9, 10, and 11 we see how God's promises to Israel will be fulfilled — and all of it was almost too much for the Apostle to take in! And so, with his soul lifted toward heaven, he penned these words which we could not pass over in considering the Prayers of the Apostle Paul: (Read Romans 11:33-36.)

Perhaps there have been times in your life when you have been so under the power of the Word of God that your soul soared to heights you have never known before.

E. M. Bounds, in his wonderful little book, Power Through Prayer, tells the story of a man by the name of the Marquis DeRenty. He was a man of wealth who had servants, and he told one of them to call him from his devotions in thirty minutes. The servant looked in when the Marquis told

him to call him, but he was so occupied in his prayers and praises, that he could not make himself interrupt the Marquis. Three and a half hours went by, and the servant felt that he had to call his Master — and so he did. As the Marquis came out of his room he remarked "that the half hour was so short when he was communing with Christ" (Power Through Prayer, p. 42).

Bishop Handley Moule was a minister in the Church of England in generations past. In his commentary Romans, this is what he had to say about our text:

Here the Apostle's voice, as we seem to listen to it, pauses for a moment, as he passes into unspoken thoughts of awe and faith. He has now given out his prophetic burthen [burden], telling us Gentiles how great has been the sin of Israel, but how great also is Israel's privilege, and how sure his coming mercy. And behind this grand special revelation there still rise on his soul those yet more majestic forms of truth which he has led us to look upon before; the Righteousness of God, the justifying grace, the believing soul's dominion over sin, the fulness of the Spirit, the coming glory of the saints, the emancipated Universe, the eternal Love. What remains, after this mighty process of spiritual discoveries, but to adore?...

(Read the text again.)

And then Moule continued:

We also prostrate our being, with the Apostle, with the Roman saints, with the whole Church, with all the company of heaven, and give ourselves to that action of pure worship in which the creature, sinking lowest in his own eyes, yea out of his own sight altogether, rises highest into the light of his Maker. What a moment this is, what an occasion, for such a approach to Him Who is the infinite and personal Fountain of being, and of redemption! We have been led from reason to reason, from doctrine to doctrine, from one link to another in a golden chain of redeeming mercies. We have had the dream of human merit expelled from the heart with arrows of light; and the pure glory of a grace most absolute, most merciful, has come in upon us in its place. All along we have been reminded as it were in fragments and radiant glimpses, that these doctrines, these truths, are no mere principles in the abstract, but expressions of the will and of the love of a Person; that fact full of eternal life, but all too easily forgotten by the human mind, when its study of religion is carried away, if but for an hour, from the foot of the Cross, and of the Throne. But

now all these lines converse upwards to their Origin. By the Cross they reach the Throne. Through the Work of the Son--One with the Father, for of the Son too it is written (Col. I. 16) that "all things are through Him, and unto Him"--through His Work, and in it, we come to the Father's Wisdom and Knowledge, which drew the plan of blessing, and as it were calculated the furnished all its means. We touch that point where the creature *gravitates* to its final rest, the vision of the Glory of God. We repose, with a profound and rejoicing silence, before the fact of mysteries too bright for our vision. After all the revelations of the Apostle we own with him in faith, with an acquiescence deep in our being, the fact that there is no searching, no tracking out, the final secrets of the ways of God. It becomes to us wonderfully sufficient, in the light of Christ, to know that "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious," is also Sovereign, Ultimate, His own eternal Satisfaction; that it is infinitely fit and blessed that, as His will is the true efficient cause of all things, and His Presence their secret of continuance, so He is Himself their final Cause, their End, their Goal; They fulfil their idea, they find their bliss, in being altogether His (Moule, H. G. C., The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 317-319).

And so it is no wonder that we find this passage, and this prayer, concluded with the words found in verse 36. (Read.)

How was it that Paul's heart was raised to such heights of glory and praise? Was it something that he was seeking? I would have to say, "No, it was not an experience he was seeking." It came to him as a result of his deep understanding of the truths of salvation, and of his meditation on them. And the more we enter into an understanding of what Paul wrote in the first eleven chapters of this epistle, the more we will enter into the worship which filled his heart as he came to this point in the epistle.

In the time that remains, let us consider together these last four, marvelous verses of Romans 11. What do we have here?

Throughout these first wonderful eleven chapters of Romans Paul has guided us step by step through the glorious truths of our salvation. And it has all had to do with GOD--His goodness, His mercy, His *grace*, His love, and all of this in the context of His righteousness. God did not, and could not, lower His holy standards in providing for us through Christ our justification, our sanctification, and our glorification. And no passage could possibly be clearer than this one that all of the glory and honor and

praise for our salvation belongs exclusively to God. None of the glory comes to us; all of the glory belongs to the Triune God — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

— Let me enlarge on that for just a moment.

You will notice in our text that "God" is mentioned in verse 33, and "the Lord" is mentioned in verse 34. I am going to suggest that in verse 33 Paul was speaking about God the Father, but that verses 34 through 36 refer to our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Now let us go a step farther. Perhaps your translation of the Bible indicates in some way that Paul's words in verses 34 and 35 are a quotation of Isaiah 40:13, 14 which says,

13 Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him?

14 With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

In comparing this with our text in Rom. 11, it is interesting to see that Isaiah was actually speaking of the Holy Spirit! Paul, in quoting it, applied it to "the Lord," which I take as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. But what does this mean? It means that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all so intimately involved in the work of our salvation, that statements like we have here can apply to Any of Them, or to All of Them. All Three are deserving of praise for our salvation, but none comes to us.

In looking at verse 33 we see:

I. THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD (Rom. 11:33).

Paul exalted four things about God which are very apparent in our salvation:

- 1) His wisdom.
- 2) His knowledge.
- 3) His judgments.
- 4) His ways.

And he prefaces the first two with the statement, "O the depth of the riches," but in connection with God's judgments he used the word "unsearchable," and with God's "ways," "past finding out."

James Denney in his commentary on Romans says that "depth" is "a

universal figure for that which is immeasurable or incalculable" (The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. 2, p. 686). Nobody will ever be as wise as God is, and nobody will ever know all that God knows. We need to remember this when we question God's dealings with us. God's knowledge amounts to omniscience, and it is probably most correct to say that God's wisdom is the application of His knowledge in His dealings with men and nations.

God's judgments and His ways are the outworking of His knowledge and wisdom. But they are "unsearchable" and "past finding out." Williams translated the latter part of this verse in this way:

How unsearchable His decisions, and how mysterious His methods.

This would include the great doctrine of election — why God has chosen to save some, but not to save all, and why He has even chosen those whom He intends to save. It would include the ways in which He works in our lives to sanctify us. Isaiah informed the people of God long ago that God's ways and thoughts are not only completely different from ours, but that they are higher and better. They are completely without fault.

All of these grand truths did not make the Apostle Paul uneasy with God, but brought from his heart the highest praise and adoration.

But now let us go on to see what he had to say about the Lord, i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THE GLORY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST (Rom. 11:34-36).

Here we have Paul's quotation of Isa. 40:13, 14. Just as God is above even the greatest and most godly of men, the same is true of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 2:16 gives us another quotation of the Isaiah passage.

We only know the mind of the Lord as far as He has revealed it, and even then our understanding is very limited. We can never exhaust the meaning of all that the Lord has told us in His Word.

And it is sure that none of us has ever been qualified to teach the Lord, or to tell Him what to do. Man had no part in the planning of salvation, nor in the way it should be worked out. We are utterly dependent upon our Lord to do that which is pleasing to Himself.

Neither can any of us say that we have obligated God to us. We never take the first step toward Him. We do not seek Him; He seeks us. Man

did not even ask God to provide a way of salvation. We would all have been content to die in our sins if God had not graciously stepped in to meet our needs. What God does with us and for us is always done in pure grace. God is not in debt to any of us.

And then in verse 36 we come to the grand and glorious climax of Paul's doxology:

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

How important prepositions are in Scripture: "Of...through...to..."

Strong defines the Greek word, "of" — ek, as designating the source or starting point from which action proceeds. "Through" — dia, Christ is the channel through Whom the work of salvation is accomplished. The same is true of divine judgment. "To" — eis, lit., unto. All things have been designated for His glory.

Spurgeon said when he was dealing with this verse that no one ever lived [we would say, "with the exception of our Lord"] who could ever do justice to this great text. It goes far beyond our ability to understand it fully, as well as to comprehend the depth of its meaning. But then he went on to say this:

It is laid down by the apostle Paul, as a general principle, that all things come from God: they are *of* Him as their *source*; they are *through* Him as their *means*; they are *to* Him as their *end*. They are *of* Him in the *plan*, *through* Him in the *working*, and *to* him in the *glory* which they produce (Vol.10, p. 301).

It is, then, little wonder that Paul concluded his doxology with the words, "To Whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Conc: I think that we will all agree that at this point in Paul's writing of this epistle, he was "lost in wonder, love, and praise." He marvelled at the work of God in salvation. His own heart was drawn out to the Lord in, perhaps, a greater love for the Lord than ever before. And the words of our text show that words of praise flowed freely from his heart in gratitude to God for such a great salvation. His praise expressed not only joy, but a deep understanding of the nature of salvation even though it was also a confession that he could never, at least in this life, understand it all.

The question for all of us to face today, is this: Do I feel about God and

about Christ and about salvation, the way the Apostle Paul did? And we can add to that question, this one: Can I honestly make Paul's words my words, and repeat Rom. 11:33-36 as my own, saying them from the heart? If not, why not?

Well, the first reason that these words may not strike a responsive chord in our hearts is because we are not saved. A truly saved person might not be able to express himself, or herself, as Paul did, but he will surely want to — and will at least say a hearty "Amen" to what Paul said. So if the truth of salvation does not cause you to want to praise the Lord for salvation like Paul did, search your own heart, examine yourself to make sure that you know the Lord. And if your heart is cold and unresponsive, seek the Lord this very moment. He is not far from any of us. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ Who died to save sinners from their sins. God's promise still stands, that if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting Him and Him alone for our salvation, we shall be saved.

But most of us here today, and perhaps most of you who will hear this message on radio, are saved. You know the Lord as your Savior, but still you do not find your heart filled with praise to the Lord like Paul's heart was. What is the need for us?

It is easy for us to see that it was God's Word that brought Paul to such a high peak of praise. Although he wrote this epistle, the Spirit of God was guiding him in the choice of every word which he used. And contemplating God's wonderful work of salvation through Christ, he found his heart overflowing in praise to God and to Christ.

What does this tell us about our need? Our need is to spend more time reading the Word, and, after reading it, to meditate on what we have read. It is so easy to read our Bibles like we would read an assignment for school, without taking the time to think about what we have read. We need to read and re-read and re-read the Word until the truth grips our hearts. The more we read, the more the Holy Spirit will give us understanding. And the more we understand of a work which we can never understand fully, the more our hearts will be filled with the kind of praise that we find here at the end of Romans 11.

The professing church today is in search of excitement, but most of what passes for excitement is nothing more than the world gets from its music and its entertainment. The joy, the blessing, the praise which gripped the heart of the Apostle Paul at this point transcends all of the superficial joys of the world. May it be ours today as the Word dwells richly in us.

A PRAYER FOR UNITY

Romans 15:5, 6

Intro: I want to continue today with the series on the Prayers of the Apostle Paul which I was bringing to you before taking a couple of weeks of vacation. I hope that most of you will remember that the last prayer of the apostle which we considered is the one at the end of chapter 11 — the last four verses. Paul's heart was so overwhelmed with the blessing he had experienced in covering the doctrine of salvation, that his heart was lifted up in a doxology of praise, and that is what we find in Rom. 11:33-35.

That doxology also brought to a close the doctrinal section of the book of Romans. And it is on the basis of all that salvation means that Paul moved on into the practical section of the epistle, beginning with those familiar words found in Rom. 12:1, 2. (Repeat.) If we understand the doctrine of salvation, we will also realize that we need to give ourselves to the Lord, to break away from the world in its lifestyle, have our minds renewed, so that we can live in the enjoyment of the will of God, making it the purpose of our lives that we please the Lord.

However, Paul does not go very far before he teaches us that through Christ we have been brought into a great fellowship — a fellowship of others who have also been saved. We need to be humble in our relationship with each other because we are all members of the body of Christ. And as members of the body of Christ we are members of each other just as the members of our human bodies are members of each other. A body has many members, but they do not all have the same function in the body. Nevertheless, our relationship to Christ and to each other in the body of Christ is the basis for our oneness, our unity. And then Paul made statements like we have in Rom. 12:10 (read), and verse 13 (read), and verse 15 (read), and verse 16 (read).

Verse 15 mentions the mind, just as Paul mentioned the mind in verse 1 of this chapter. The mind has to do with what we believe, and what we think. A Christian has to learn the truth, and he has to learn to think differently about God, about life in general, about right and wrong, about our relationships with people whether they be Christians or non-Christians. This is the subject of the latter part of the book of Romans. Read chapters 13 and 14 noting especially what Paul had to say about our relationship to each other as believers. You will notice many things that have to do with how we are to behave toward each other.

When we come to chapter 15 we find that there are two reasons why our

fellowship with each other is threatened. Paul had introduced the first one in chapter 14, but he continued it in chapter 15. The first reason is that among the Lord's people some are strong and some are weak. Often this difference is due to the length of time that people have been saved. A newborn babe in Christ obviously is like a newborn babe in physical life. Babies are not strong. They need to grow. They need to increase in strength. A Christian grows as his knowledge of God increases through the Word. And when I say "God" I mean all Three Persons of the Godhead — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A Christian grows as he understands the truths of Scripture more perfectly. And the evidence that a Christian is growing is seen in the fact that his life is being changed. He seeks to please the Lord. He wants to be more holy. His whole life is being changed because it is God's purpose in salvation to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. But, you see, the fact that we are at different stages in our spiritual growth is one of the main causes for the divisions which often exist among us. And we need to be aware of this.

But there is a second reason why our fellowship is often threatened. And Paul addressed that in the verses following the prayer that we are considering today. In the first century it was the fact that some Christians were Jews, and others were Gentiles. The Jews had a hard time accepting the fact that Gentiles could become the people of God without submitting to certain things which the Jews had under the Law. This included such a thing as circumcision. But many had a hard time giving up the shadows that they had under the Law, and so there was the Jew-Gentile problem.

National problems, and that which is closely related to national problems, racial problems, have always posed a threat to the fellowship of the people of God. This is the reason we need a verse like Rom. 12:3. (Read.)

I could also add social problems — the differences that exist between us in society. We are not facing reality if we say that these cannot be problems in the church.

There will always be these differences among us. The solution is not in legislation, but in the hearts of people. This is the burden of Paul's prayer. And look at what he wrote in Rom. 15:7-13. (Read.) What a day that will be when people from all walks of society, from every tongue and tribe and nation, lift up their voices together to praise the One Who has redeemed us all through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ! However, for those of us who know the Lord, such barriers should be broken down now that our lives and our praise can bring the greatest glory to God.

Now it is in the light of all of these potential problems that Paul prayed the prayer that we have in verses 5 and 6 of Romans 15. (Read.)

Paul's request is given in verse 5. And the reason for his request, or the purpose of his request is given in verse 6. His request was that "the God of patience and consolation" would lit. give, or make, or "**grant** you to be likeminded one toward another." The purpose: "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God." Let us consider these verses because the need is just as great today as it was in Paul's day.

I. PAUL'S BURDEN (Rom. 15:5).

That fact that this is a prayer is an indication, as Matthew Henry pointed out in his commentary, that likemindedness is a gift from God. If God doesn't make us likeminded, we won't be likeminded. If we realized how important this likemindedness is, and that only God can give it to us, we would spend more of our time praying about it.

What does it mean to be likeminded? The NIV translates this verse to indicate that Paul was asking God to give the believers in the church at Rome "a spirit of unity." The Greek verb with the words used with it in this verse means, to think alike, to agree together, to hold the same views.

It would be very helpful to read all of the passages where this verb is used. We know that Paul was not talking about setting aside the things that we differ on, as many groups do today. Those who are trying to get Protestants and Catholics together today are willing to compromise the truth, and let people believe things that are not in the Scriptures just for the same of "getting together." The same is true of Promise Keepers. They really have no solid doctrinal standard which is according to Scripture. If they did they would not accept some of the groups that are a part of their movement.

No, the primary idea about being likeminded, or being one, is an encouragement to study the Scriptures, to learn the great doctrines of the Word of God, so that there can be unity in the truth, not unity at the expense of the truth. But one thing the truth of Scripture does for us is to make us loving and patient toward those who may not have had the opportunities that we have had to become acquainted with the Word of God. Paul's expression, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) was made in the chapter of that epistle (Ephesians) where he had exhorted the church at Ephesus to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), and where he had said that God has given men as gifts to the church,

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry,

for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:12-16).

There must be likemindedness in the Word of God or there can be no true unity among the people of God. Let this be a point that you and I will never forget. Just because people are Catholics or Protestants, does not mean that they are Christians. Paul was not talking about unity among the religions of the world; he was speaking about unity among those who are true believers in Christ.

Notice how Paul spoke of God in his prayer: "the God of patience and consolation." There are two things that we ought to get from this title — because it is a name of God.

This first is that God exercises great patience and offers great encouragement to us as we struggle with the problems that keep us apart. One of the big hindrances to unity is pride in our own hearts. The strong Christian can be proud that he knows so much; the weak Christian, that he is not going to let anyone tell him what to believe. How thankful we all should be that God is so patient with us, that He perseveres in working in all of our hearts, and that He continues to give us encouragement so that we will persevere in seeking to do His will, and in remaining faithful to His Word.

The second point in this title for God is that God is the source of all of the patience which we need in dealing with each other, and He is the One Who gives us the encouragement to believe that the church can truly find the kind of unity which pleases God. So when we are about to despair of attaining unity, let us look to the God Who supplies all of the resources that we need to be and do that which pleases Him.

But before we leave Paul's request, let me point out one more truth from verse 5. It has to do with the words, "according to Christ Jesus."

Our unity is in Christ Jesus. Any unity which ignores Him, or denies what the Scriptures teach about Him, or which is not based upon Him, and patterned after Him, is not true, Biblical unity. I recently heard a man speaking about the Gospel, but all through his message he spoke only of God. Salvation meant coming to God, coming to God our Father. It was as though he believed that God is the Father of all people; we just have to realize that, and come to Him. But the Bible says that we can't come to God except we come through Christ. When you listen to religious people, listen carefully to hear what they have to say about Christ, and beware of any organization or any person who does not make Christ the very foundation of our relationship with God. And not just the living Christ as our Example, but the Christ of the Cross, Who died to redeem sinners from the wrath of God.

As Paul usually did, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit he packed a lot of truth into this first verse of his prayer. But now let us go on to the second verse.

II. THE PURPOSE OF PAUL'S PRAYER (Rom. 15:6).

We can never do what Paul prayed that we should do in verse 6, unless first of all we have experienced the likemindedness that he prayed for in verse 5. You might just as well talk about running your car without any gas in the tank as to talk of glorifying God without being likeminded with each other.

Let me mention that we will never experience perfect likemindedness here in this life, but we ought to be making progress every day toward that end, and sincerely lament the things that keep us from true unity.

But let us think about glorifying God. What does it mean to glorify God?

The Greek verb means to render God glorious in the eyes and to the hearts of men. Disunity among us as the Lord's people turns people away from the Lord; likemindedness draws people to the Lord. But it is also likemindedness that causes us to want to glorify God. Likemindedness makes it easy for us to speak about the Lord. We can glorify God by praising Him, by worshiping Him, by speaking lovingly to others of Him. But notice that it must come from the mind before it can come from effectively from the mouth. "The mind" is equal to saying, from the heart. Likemindedness is not something that is established by some man-made resolution; it is a work of God in our minds and in our hearts. Perhaps the main reason that there is not more glorifying of the Lord among us is because we know so little of what it means to be likeminded.

One more point from verse 6, and I am through.

Did you notice that Paul mentioned Christ again at the end of verse 6 just like he did at the end of verse 5? Paul never tired of speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, and never failed to point out that the only way we can have anything to do with God is through the Lord Jesus Christ. And here he pointed out that it is necessary to glorify God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ — meaning that the Lord Jesus Christ was identical in His Deity to the Father, that He was equal to the Father in every respect in His Deity.

If a person does not believe that Jesus Christ is uniquely and eternally the Son of the Father, there is no way that he can glorify God! We might have very well-worded prayers and rituals, but God looks into our hearts to see what we believe about the Lord Jesus Christ, and whether or not we are trusting Him as our Savior. If so, our praise is acceptable to Him. If not, our praise really becomes blasphemy.

Conc: Do you see how important to God is our relationship to each other? And do you see that our relationship to each other must be based upon the Word of God and upon our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Bible has a lot to say about likemindedness. When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he exhorted two ladies, Euodias and Syntyche, "that they be of the same mind in the Lord." And before that he exhorted the whole church to have the mind of Christ. Even our testimony to the world will only be effective as we are of the same mind in the Lord. Listen to what Paul told the Philippians in Phil. 1:27:

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Illus: Abraham's dealings with Lot after they came out of Egypt.

7 And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left (Gen.

13:7-9).

Who had the greatest rights? Who knew God the best? Who took steps to resolve their problem? Who was most like Christ in His behavior?

— The answer to all of these questions is, Abraham. Our desire to be likeminded will be seen in our behavior when conflicts come up as they did with Abraham and Lot.

Let us pray this prayer for ourselves, and for our church. Let us pray that the Lord's people today throughout the world will be awakened to see the need we have to be likeminded if we are to be able to glorify God, and if we are to become instruments in God's hands in reaching people with the Gospel of His grace.

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CALLING UPON THE GOD OF HOPE

Romans 15:13

Intro: When we suddenly come upon a prayer in the Bible like the one we find in Romans 15:13, we should ask ourselves, "What prompted this prayer? Why did the Apostle Paul pray this prayer at this particular place?"

The only way we can answer such question is by turning to the context — the verses which led up to it, and/or the verses which follow. It is most likely that we will get the most help from the verses which led up to it. And so we ask ourselves, "What was Paul saying in the preceding verses?"

He was speaking about God's purpose, expressed in His Word, that Gentiles would be saved. We have quotations from:

- 1) Psa. 18:49 in verse 9.
- 2) Deut. 32:43 in verse 10.
- 3) Psa. 117:1 in verse 11.
- 4) Isa. 11:1 combined with Isa. 11:10 in verse 12.

Psalm 18 was written by David. Deut. 32 was written by Moses. We don't know who the writer of Psa. 117 was, but it makes no difference; he wrote under the direction of the Spirit of God. And, of course, the two verses from Isa. 11 were written by the prophet Isaiah. So we see that the Spirit of God led Moses and David and Isaiah and another Psalmist to say the same thing: that it was in God's plan not only to save Jews, but also to save Gentiles.

We could add to these verses a verse which those of us who are reading our Bibles through on the schedule which we give out at the beginning of each year, will read tomorrow — in Gal. 3:8. Listen to what Paul said in that passage:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

Where did Paul find those words of God which were spoken to Abram? He found them in Gen. 12:3. So Abraham knew that salvation was not just for his family, his descendants, but that the Gentiles were also included in the plan of God to save sinners.

Jonah knew it, too, but he did not want to believe it. However, after experiencing the judgment of God, and also the mercy of God in sparing his life, he went to the wicked Gentile city of Nineveh, preached the Gospel, and saw the whole city turn to the Lord!

So it was no secret that God intended to save Gentiles as well as Jews. However, it was very hard for the Jews in the early church to accept this. At the very least many of the Jews wanted the Gentiles to submit to certain parts of the Law if they were to be saved. The council in Jerusalem that we read about in Acts 15 was to deal with this matter.

Now apparently all of this uproar was very disturbing, very unsettling, to Gentile believers. The church at Rome was a Gentile church, that is, predominantly Gentile. There may have been some Jews in it, but most of them were Gentiles. Paul was writing to encourage those Gentile believers. This was one of the main reasons for Romans 9, 10, 11. And it certainly was in Paul's mind when he wrote in Romans 1,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, **and also to the Greek** (Rom. 1:16).

Notice also what Paul said in verse 8 and running into verse 9 about the ministry of the Jesus Christ. He came to the Jews, to confirm the promises that had been made to the fathers, the patriarchs, but also that "the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy," that is, glorify God that His mercy in salvation included them!

And so Paul did not want the Gentiles to be troubled with doubts which may have been raised by some Jewish believers, and so he prayed the prayer that I want to consider with you today:

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 15:13).

The church at Rome needed *hope*! Not only that, but they needed *to abound in hope*! And that was the burden of Paul's prayer. Let us examine it in detail in the time that we have.

First of all, let us think again about the meaning of the word *hope* in Scripture. I say "again" because we have considered it many times before.

I. THE MEANING OF THE WORD *HOPE*.

In Scripture *hope* looks to the end of our salvation, the goal, the fulfillment of God's purposes in salvation. *Hope* is very important because if we can be assured of the end, then we can be at peace about the present, and about all that lies ahead in the future. If I know that the goal of my salvation is guaranteed, then I don't need to worry about what might happen to change it today, or tomorrow, or any day in the future.

Hope is actually a very important word in this epistle to the Romans. Let me ask you to turn to the following passages where the word *hope* appears, leading up to the prayer we are considering today where Paul used the word for the last times in Romans. This is where you will find Paul used the word:

- 1) In Rom. 4:18 where he was speaking of the trial of faith that Abraham went through waiting for a son to be born. Let me read verse 17 with it.
- 2) Rom. 5:2, 4, 5.
- 3) Rom. 8:20 (with 21), 24, 25.
- 4) Rom. 12:12.
- 5) Rom. 15:4.
- 6) Rom. 15:13 — our text for today.

The hope of our salvation was perfectly described by the Apostle John in 1 John 3:1-3:

- 1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons [Gk: children] of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.
- 2 Beloved, now are we the sons [Gk: children] of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.
- 3 And every man that hath **this hope** in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Our hope is that we will be like the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the goal of our salvation. And that goal will finally be reached when the Lord Jesus comes for His Church.

I trust that we all have a clear understanding of this Biblical word *hope*.

Now, even though our salvation is certain, not every believer has that assurance. And so now we need to ask, "How can we be assured of our salvation, not only that we have it, but that we can never lose it?"

So let me take as my second point:

II. THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

How can I know that I am saved forever?

Let us remember that Paul was speaking, according to Romans 1:7, "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints." So he was

writing to those who knew the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, and only to those who has trusted in Christ. Paul had no doubt but that there was a group of true believers in Rome. See what he said in Rom. 15:14, just following the prayer we are considering.

With that in mind, how do we get *the hope* that we need, and want? I will give you four answers to that question.

The first answer is:

A. From God.

He is "the God of hope." This means that He is the Source of all hope. Our hope, if we have it, comes from Him, and if we don't have it, we must seek it from Him.

Notice that Paul did not ask them to remember the time and place and the circumstances under which they feel that they trusted Christ. He does not turn their thoughts to themselves and their experience of salvation, but he turned them *to God!* Let's not consider for the moment *how* God does this, but just simply the truth that if we are to have hope, it must come from God. Paul believed that the lives of believers should be *God-centered*. Look to Him for your hope because He is "the God of hope." To turn anywhere but to God will only make your doubts increase.

But you have the right to say, "How do I turn to God?" And that is what you should ask. And that leads me to my second point:

B. The Scriptures.

This is what Paul did in verses 9, and 10, and 11, and 12. As I have already pointed out to you, Paul quoted from Deuteronomy, the Psalms, and Isaiah. The Gentile believers seem to be worried about whether or not they had a right to believe that they were saved. How could that be settled? By turning to God's Book, the Scriptures. And this is one way we turn to God; we turn to His Book! And it is by the Word that God gives us the faith to believe what we read in His Word. The OT Scriptures make it very clear that God intended from the very beginning to save Gentiles, and that settles it for the child of God. You know the saying that someone coined: "If God said it, I believe it, and that settles it." That is the way it ought to be.

And it is important for every Gentile to understand that when God spoke of the salvation of the Gentiles, He was not speaking of a different kind of

salvation from that of the Jews, nor was He speaking of a different Savior. There is only one salvation, and there is only one Savior. And it makes no difference whether a person be a Jew or a Gentile, all must come to God through Christ or they cannot come at all.

If you want to know what salvation is, read the Bible. If you don't know what the Bible says, you will not be able to judge the rightness or the wrongness of what people may tell you about salvation. The Apostle John who was used to give us part of the Word of God, said of his first epistle,

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13).

The more we read our Bibles, and the more we absorb the truth of the Word, the greater will be the assurance of our hope.

But there is another Person that we need to remember:

C. The Holy Spirit.

And Paul particularly mentioned here, "the power of the Holy Spirit." It is by "the power of the Holy Spirit" that we are brought to the place where we "abound in hope." And it is the Holy Spirit Who gives us "joy and peace in believing" what He has caused men to write in the Word. The Holy Spirit is the One Who guides us into the truth. Everything you and I have learned about the Word of God, the Holy Spirit has taught us. We may have suddenly understood about our salvation through our own reading, or in listening to some godly teacher of the Word, or in reading some good book in which the writer has explained the truth, but it is always the Holy Spirit Who is behind, powerfully behind, the ministry of the Word of God to our hearts. If the Holy Spirit is not using me this morning to help you, I might just as well sit down and be quiet. I am just as dependent upon the Holy Spirit as you are. We all need to look to Him. But in these days when we are inclined to make so much of certain Bible study methods, we are in great danger of forgetting the Holy Spirit. And that is one reason we have such a diversity of teaching. We know so little of what it means to be taught by the Spirit. If what the Lord has enabled me to say today about the Holy Spirit would make even one of you more concerned about looking to Him for your understanding of the truth, our time together will have been well spent.

But I must mention one other point that is important in being assured of the hope that we have in Christ. It is:

D. Prayer.

That is so obvious that we are in danger of overlooking it. What was Paul doing for the believers in Rome? He was praying for them! Even with the great teaching he had given them in this epistle, he knew that the Holy Spirit was the only One Who could make them understand what he was saying, cause them to believe it, and thus enter into the enjoyment of their salvation.

I wonder how many of us prayed before we came today that the God by His Spirit would help us to understand what we hear, and to believe it, that our lives might be changed as a result. And what about doing what Paul was doing here; he was interceding for others. If more Christians were "filled with all joy and peace in believing," there would be less casualties among us, because there would be more who would know what it is to be "abounding in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Let me say very emphatically today: God's ways do not change. He is the One Who is in charge of His work. He doesn't need the showmanship and the entertainment and all of the specialized workshops that have become so important today. All we need is the Lord and His Word which points us to Christ, and the Holy Spirit to teach us, and prayer as a means of fellowship with God so that together we can learn what it means to walk with the Lord, "abounding in hope." What a day it will be for the church, and for the world, too, when you and I as the Lord's people get back to the basics and forget all of the froth that is so prevalent in churches today.

Conc: "Abounding in hope." Let me close by pointing out the meaning of that expression. A person abounds when he has more than enough. Every Christian is rich, spiritually rich, but many don't know that they are. They live like spiritual paupers. They live with doubts and fears. They know little of the "joy and peace in believing" which Paul spoke about in his prayer. We need not only to have hope, but we need to "abound in hope," not because of who we are, nor because we feel that we will always be faithful to the Lord. We can abound in hope because we have a "God of hope," a great "God of hope," Who not only saves us, but keeps us, and some day will finish this wonderful work of salvation when we will be like the Lord Jesus.

You see, Christians are not self-made people; they are God-made people. Only God can save us, and only He can perfect us. Let us seek what we need in His way, and trust Him to lead us into a life of "all joy and peace," abounding in hope. (Close by repeating the text.)

CONFLICT IN PRAYER

Romans 15:30-33

Intro: We all know, or should know, that God gave us His Word to reveal Himself to us. I have said many times that the Bible is a revelation *from* God, and it is a revelation *of* God. And when I say "God," I mean all three Members of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Peter, in speaking of the Scriptures, said that men of God spoke as they were moved along by the Holy Spirit. You will find that in 2 Pet. 1:21. God has spoken by the Holy Spirit through those who wrote the books of the Old and New Testaments.

We also have the testimony of our Lord Who said on one occasion when He was speaking to leaders of the Jews,

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (John 5:39).

And we learn from the Gospel of Luke that after our Lord's resurrection, when he was with two of His disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, that he began "at Moses and all the prophets," and "expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The Lord, of course, was using the OT Scriptures, but the same is true of the NT. They tell us about Christ; they tell us about God; they tell us about the Holy Spirit.

And yet, while the Members of the Godhead are the main subjects of Scripture, they are not the only subjects. The Bible also tells us about ourselves! We learn from God's Book, the Bible, that we are sinners, under the judgment of God. We learn that it is impossible for us to do what is necessary to make our relationship with God right. But we also learn that God has had mercy upon sinners, and has sent His Son to be the Savior of all who will put their trust in Him. Our salvation was purchased by the death of Christ, the shedding of His precious blood, when He died to save His people from their sins. The only true picture that has ever been given us of man is that which is given in the Bible.

But the Bible does something else. It tells us about those who are the people of God. We not only see how God has changed them, but we also see how they are not yet perfect. We see their strengths, but we also see their weaknesses. We see that although they are now capable of pleasing God, but we see that it is still possible for them to displease Him. We see their faith, but we also see their fears. We see that those who were the strongest spiritually were the same people who were very conscious that they needed the Lord every day and in every way.

The Apostle Paul was a man like that. Perhaps no man has ever lived, with the exception of our Lord, who knew the truth better than the Apostle Paul did. His faith and his faithfulness have been both an example and inspiration to every believer from his day down to the present. But it is all to the glory of God that he was the kind of a Christian that he was.

However, most of us are inclined to set Paul on such a pedestal that we fail to notice expressions from his own writings that he was still human, that he still had his weaknesses. Paul never outgrew his need for the Lord. And he was always conscious of that need. He was not self-sufficient; his sufficiency was in God, as he said in 2 Cor. 3:5. And his need for God was always illustrated by the large place that prayer had in his life.

Years ago I was speaking with a fellow faculty member of the Multnomah School of the Bible. He was having some struggles with fears in his own life, and I had read just shortly before our conversation together that the Apostle Paul had said about himself in 2 Cor. 7:5,

For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; **without were fightings, within were fears.**

Many of you will remember that even David said, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psa. 56:3).

All of the exhortations in Scripture for us to trust in the Lord, and not be afraid, are indications that it is possible for us to be afraid.

Now I am not suggesting that Paul and David and others went around all of the time in a state of fear, but I am saying that there were times in their lives when they were afraid. There were times when they faced situations over which they had no control, perhaps dangerous situations, and they were definitely concerned for their lives. They were afraid.

As Paul faced his immediate future, he was definitely concerned about the dangers he faced. And so the first thing we find in our text is:

I. PAUL'S REQUEST FOR PRAYER (Rom. 15:30).

When we were considering Paul's prayers in his letters to the church at Thessalonica, we saw that in both of those epistles he said, "Brethren, pray for us." See 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1. In our text in Romans 15

he was a little more specific, and he described prayer in a different way. Notice that here he said, "Now I beseech you, brethren..." (Read the whole verse.) He was not just asking them to pray *for* him, but he was asking them to pray *with* him. He was praying, and he wanted them to join with him in prayer.

But he also spoke of their praying together as *a striving together*. He wanted them to strive together with him. Paul used a word which was suggestive of a conflict, of a warfare. It is a word which described prayer as contending with enemies. It indicated that there were dangers and difficulties standing in the way of his ministry. He was calling upon them to join with him in contending with an enemy.

We are yet to come to Ephesians in considering Paul's prayers, but when we do, we will be dealing with Paul's words found in Eph. 6:12,

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Paul believed that his chief Enemy in the work of the Gospel was the Devil and the fallen angels. This is how he described them. And he also believed that the only way we can be victorious over the Devil and his angels was by prayer! The Devil uses people, and it was the way he uses people that Paul was concerned about. He often uses those who do not know the Lord, but sometimes he uses those who know the Lord. But we will see more about that in a moment.

Paul was appealing to the Roman believers on two grounds. First, "for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake." By this he meant, because of their desire to see the work of the Lord prosper, but, even more, because of their love for the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, if you love Him, pray for me. But secondly he said, "And for the love of the Spirit." In Rom. 5:5 Paul taught them that the love of God had been poured out upon their hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is by that love that we love God, but it also is by that love that we as believers love each other. Paul probably was referring to the latter in this case. So he was saying, "If you love me, pray for me." He wanted them to enter into his conflict with him by prayer! And he was appealing to them on the basis of their love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and their love for him as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. That was a powerful appeal. And it ought to stir our hearts to pray for each other, and to pray for those who are in serving the Lord in some special capacity. If we were motivated in our prayer by our love for the Lord, and by our love for each other, we all would be more faithful in prayer.

We pray for those we love. Many of the believers in Rome had never met Paul, but they loved him and they loved what he was doing to spread the Gospel and to build up the people of God.

But now let us look at:

II. PAUL'S PRAYER REQUESTS (Rom. 15:31, 32).

There are three of them — the third growing out of the first two.

A. "That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea (v. 31a).

Paul hated by most Jewish people who did not know the Lord, but especially those who lived in Judaea — the very heart of Judaism! They considered him a traitor. And they would stop at nothing to do away with him. And Paul knew that they could be successful if the Lord did not protect him.

And the Lord did protect him. In Acts 21 he was delivered from certain death by a chief captain and a cohort of Roman soldiers. And the chief captain had to do it again in Acts 22. In Acts 23 he was delivered again from death because his nephew heard of a conspiracy against Paul, and then he informed the chief captain again. In Acts 24 he was spared by Felix and then Festus. And then in Acts 25 and 26 we see that King Agrippa was responsible for protecting Paul, and said that he might go free if Paul had not appealed to Caesar. And even the decision to send Paul to Rome was a double answer to Paul's prayer, as we shall see. His enemies in Jerusalem and throughout Judaea could not reach him then.

And so behind all that took place in those chapters, let us recognize the hand of God. It probably was not the way Paul had hoped that it would be, but his life was spared nevertheless.

Listen to what Paul wrote in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica:

14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

16 Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might

be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost (1 Thess. 2:14-16).

— And the fact that this was always on Paul's mind is seen in a passage from 2 Thess. 3:

- 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:
- 2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

But let us go on to:

B. Paul's second request (v. 31b).

This request was: "That my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints."

The Devil is often responsible for stirring up trouble with the people of God. It would seem that there would be no question but that the believing Jews would be delighted with Paul's gift since many of them were in

— dire need. But Paul knew that you could never depend on that. Many of the saints had evidently been turned away from Paul by the animosity of the unbelieving Jews. And so Paul gave this second request.

Perhaps Acts 21:17-20a is evidence that this second request was answered, too:

- 17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.
- 18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.
- 19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.
- 20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord...

— Probably most of us have never realized how important it is to pray this prayer for the Lord's people, not just when we are in a situation like Paul faced, but even with the ministry of the Word. We never know how the Word is being accepted. Sometimes it is not even heard. Sometimes it is heard with indifference, and then forgotten as soon as the message is over and the people are dismissed. Whatever our service for the Lord's people,

we need to pray that God will cause the people to accept it, and to profit from it, giving God the glory for it.

C. Paul's third request (v. 32).

Remember Paul's prayer in Rom. 1:9-12. (Read.) Paul's third request in Rom. 15:32 is actually a repetition of his prayer in chapter 1, but in chapter 15 he was asking the Roman church to join with him in this request.

Note that Paul was looking beyond the troubles that he might encounter in Jerusalem to the happy prospect of being with the believers in Rome. Little did Paul know how the Lord would get him there. But he wanted it to be "by the will of God" — and it was! And the book of Acts closes by telling us that Paul had two years of fruitful ministry as the people came to him to hear the Word of God.

Notice the word "refreshed." Paul wanted it to be a time of spiritual rest and refreshment (R & R). As we read a moment ago from Romans 1:12, Paul felt the need for encouragement himself, and he wanted to be an encouragement to the believers in Rome. Here again we catch a glimpse of Paul's humanity. He needed blessing just as much as they did in Rome. The Lord answered, but His ways were not Paul's ways. The Lord's ways were undoubtedly more fruitful than Paul's ways would have been.

Now we come to the last point:

III. PAUL'S REQUEST FOR THE CHURCH AT ROME (Rom. 15:33).

It is very characteristic of Paul's prayers that his final request would be for them. "The God of peace" is the God from Whom our peace comes. Matthew Henry called God "the Author and Lover of peace." The Roman believers might be anxious for all that was ahead of Paul, but God was sufficient for them as He was for Paul.

See Rom. 16:20. In Rom. 15:5 Paul spoke of God as "the God of patience and consolation. In 15:13, "the God of hope." Here "the God of peace." And Paul's prayer that "the God of peace" would be "with" them was a request, not for His presence (because His presence can never be taken away from His people). It was a prayer for His blessing. It is possible for us to be faced with the trials of life, and yet to have God's

peace in our hearts.

Charles Hodge had this to say about this final request:

It is a prayer of one petition; so full of meaning, however, that no other need be added. *The peace of God*, that peace which God gives, includes all the mercies necessary for the perfect blessedness of the soul (Romans, p. 444).

Conc: We can see from this prayer the importance which the Apostle Paul placed upon prayer in the work of the Lord. It was not only important that he pray, but it was equally important that the people of God pray for him. And it is through both that the people of God will experience peace from God, but also that the Lord's servant, facing an unknown and possibly a danger future, can nevertheless enjoy the peace of God in his heart.

Let us follow the example of the Apostle Paul, not only praying these requests, but seeking the support of others in the work that the Lord has given us to do. It is a battle, and always will be to pray as God wants us to pray. How wonderful it is to see the assurance that Paul gave the Roman church in verse 20 of Rom. 16. Victory is always with those who seek the blessing of God, although it always comes in God's way and at God's time.

A TEACHER'S CLOSING PRAYER

Romans 16:25-27

Intro: Today we are considering the last prayer of the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the church at Rome. This is found in the last three verses of chapter 16. Next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will take up Paul's epistle to the church at Philippi, so if you would like to read ahead, that can be your project, or one of them, for this coming week.

If you read through the sixteenth chapter of Romans you will see that I am passing over two short prayers which appear in this chapter before we get to verse 25. These are practically identical to each other, and appear in verses 20 and 24. The only difference is that the word "all" is added in verse 24. But "you" in verse 20 is plural, so it really amounts to a "you all" as well.

Some of you may not have verse 24 in your version. That is because it does not appear in some of the MSS of Romans, but I accept the text as it is in the KJV.

I have called this prayer found at the very end of this epistle, **A TEACHER'S CLOSING PRAYER**. It could also be called *a doxology*.

Actually it is both a prayer for the Roman believers and a doxology directed toward God. And so I will consider it that way. But the greater part of these verses is a prayer. The doxology is found in the last, short verse.

I have called it **A TEACHER'S CLOSING PRAYER** because that is exactly what it is. In this case, Paul is the teacher, but it could well serve as a prayer which any teacher of the Scriptures might use at the close of his teaching. And that fact alone suggests some very important lessons for us.

Those of you who teach the Word, know that it is important to pray before we begin preparing what we are going to say. We also need to pray just before we speak, and even while we speak we need to be looking to the Lord for His blessing. But this prayer which we are considering today teaches us that it is important for us to pray *after* we speak. It may be that one reason we don't see greater blessing resulting from the ministry of the Word is because we fail to follow up our teaching with prayer. And I am not just speaking of praying at the close of a message--although this would certainly be included. But at the close of a day when we have been teaching, or even days afterwards, we

should, as some have expressed it, water the Word with our prayers. Our purpose in teaching is twofold as far as people are concerned:

- 1) We want to teach the truth of the Word of God, but
- 2) We also want people's lives to be changed through the teaching of the Word.

And so we have a doctrinal purpose and we have a practical purpose. But it is only God Who can really make people understand the Word, and it is only God Who can make people see how the Word is to be used in changing their lives.

In this prayer Paul began by focusing attention on the Lord, and he closed with a burst of praise for God and for the Lord Jesus Christ. Actually the Holy Spirit is the Member of the Godhead Who is appointed to be our Teacher, and the One Who applies the truth to our lives, but the Scriptures teach us that our prayers should be addressed to God. That is what Paul has done here. It is one thing to prepare a lesson or a sermon and deliver it without seeking the Lord's blessing, but it is a ministry of an entirely different kind when God is using His Word and empowering the message in the lives of those who hear.

The first thing that I want you to notice about this prayer is:

I. THE WAY PAUL ADDRESSED GOD (Rom. 16:25a).

This is what he said: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you." The NASB renders it, "Now to him who is able to establish you." The NIV and the NKJV translate it the same way. The RSV says "strengthen" in place of "stablish," or "establish." But "strengthen" is not quite strong enough. You are certainly strengthened if you are established, but there is more to being established than simply to strengthen. To be stablished, or established, is to be so thoroughly convinced of the truth of the Word of God that you would not turn away from it, and likewise to be convinced that the truth would be the one influence in your life in determining how you will live and what you hope to become, by the grace of God.

Paul used this same word in Rom. 1:11 where he wrote (reading verse 12 with it):

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, **to the end ye may be established;**

12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

You see, Paul was not satisfied just for people to enjoy his teaching; he

wanted them to believe what he was teaching, and he wanted their lives to be changed because of what he was teaching. But the important point that he was making in this prayer is that establishing people in the Word of God was a work which only God could do! And that is precisely the reason that he prayed about it. As much as Paul wanted to see the people of God established in the truth of the Word of God, he could not do that! God must do it, or it would never be done. And Paul believed very firmly that God usually works in answer to prayer. Sometimes He works when we fail to pray, but if this is in our prayers, it shows that we are not teaching with our dependence upon ourselves, but upon God where it should be! God has the power to do it; we don't. God is the One Who convinces us of the infallibility of His Word, and He is the One Who makes the Word of God the power which enables us to be holy people and to live holy lives.

Paul had just completed the most complete explanation of the doctrine of salvation that we have anywhere in all of Scripture, and it was His prayer that God would work in the heart of every believer in Rome, convincing them that this was the truth, and that nothing else could be the true doctrine of salvation.

Now this was always Paul's concern whenever he taught the Word of God, but we see in verses 17 through 20 why Paul was especially concerned about the situation in Rome. (Read Rom. 16:17-20.) The Devil and his false teachers can only draw people away from the truth if they are not established. This is why we need to be so careful that we pray as well as teach, and perhaps it would better to say that we pray as much as we teach and preach.

Now I have been talking about being established in the Word of God and by the Word of God, but now let us look at the next part of this prayers where Paul spoke of that in which we need to be established and by which we can only be established.

II. THE TRUTH IN WHICH WE NEED TO BE ESTABLISHED (Rom. 16:25b, 26).

Now look carefully at verses 25 and 26. I want to point out two words which appear three times in these two verses. They are the words, "according to." You will see them twice in verse 25, and once in verse 26. (Read.)

The words "according to" mean in accordance with. Paul points out the

one standard by which all teaching must be judged. Any departure from this one standard is to be rejected.

Now the fact that we have the words, "according to," three times, does not mean that there are three standards. There is only one. The first "according to" gives us the standard, the second "according to" enlarges upon the meaning of the first, and the third "according to" further clarifies what Paul had in mind.

Let us look at these.

A. "According to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ" (v. 25m).

What is the Gospel? It is the preaching of Jesus Christ. People are not preaching the Gospel if they are not preaching Jesus Christ. The Gospel is God's message of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, Who came to earth as a Man, and then suffered and died on the Cross to save sinners from their sins. And by His resurrection we not only have the proof that His work on the Cross was completely satisfying to God, but we have proof in His resurrection that He was truly the Son of God. The Gospel is good news, good news about Jesus Christ Who by His death satisfied the righteousness of God, making it possible for God to forgive and justify all who come to Him through Christ.

Every child of God needs to be established in this truth. There are not many ways of salvation; there are not even two ways. Salvation from sin's penalty, power, and presence is only through Christ. It is only through Christ that sinners can escape the judgment of God. It is only through Christ that we can be sanctified, made holy. And it is only through Christ that we can be assured of heaven, and assured also that when we get there we are going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. Those false teachers in Rome were teaching doctrines contrary to what Paul had written in this letter to them. And Paul was warning them to "avoid" such teachers. It is only when the people of God are not established in the truth of the Gospel that false teachers can do their deadly work. But when we are established, then we recognize error when we hear it.

The word *Gospel* has been made to mean almost anything in churches today, but Paul here defined it for us. It is "the preaching of Jesus Christ."

But let us go on to the next statement.

B. "According to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the teaching of the prophets" (Rom. 16:25b, 26a).

The word *mystery* is a very important NT word, and in this prayer we have one of the passages where the word is defined. It has a special meaning in Scripture. It does not mean something that is mysterious or difficult to understand. Instead, it means something which has not been revealed in OT times, but is now revealed, as our text says. (Read.)

The truth we have in Scripture is revealed truth, that is, truth which God has made known, and which we would not know if He had not seen fit to make it known. But He has reserved some truth to be fully revealed until after the Lord Jesus Christ had come and had finished His work of salvation.

We had this word *mystery* before in Rom. 11:25:

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

It was not revealed in the OT that there would be a time like we are living in today, when the ministry of the Word would be changed from a particularly ministry to Israel to one in which the doors of salvation would be thrown wide open to the Gentiles. The Jews in the first century were very reluctant to accept this teaching. They were inclined to believe that Gentiles could only be saved if they submitted to the Law, and to circumcision. Paul was especially hated because he was a minister to the Gentiles. But Paul was one of God's instruments, the main one, to show that God had always planned this, but just had not revealed the full extent of it before. It was *a mystery*. "The scriptures of the prophets" must be a reference to NT prophets, not the OT prophets. Paul was both an apostle and a prophet, and it was through him that this revelation was made clear. And it included not only that a major work of God would be done in the Gentile world, but that Jewish and Gentile believers would be fellow-heirs in the body of Christ. The Gentile believers in Rome needed to understand this so they would not be deceived or discouraged by those who persisted in teaching the Law, and Jewish believers needed to understand this so they would not exclude Gentiles who believed in Christ.

But so believers would know that this was not just Paul's idea, he went on

to a third, "according to":

**C. "According to the commandment of the everlasting God,
made known to all nations for the obedience of faith"
(Rom. 16:26b).**

All of this was under the direction of "the everlasting God," and made known at His "commandment." "The everlasting God" is a title of God which indicates not only that He is without beginning and without end, but also that He never changes. So this "mystery" was not an after-thought of God's, but it was His plan, though previously unrevealed, which He had established "since the world began."

This means that what we see today, the blindness in part of Israel, and the door of faith thrown wide open to the Gentiles, had been a part of the plan and purpose of God from before the foundation of the world. And this Gospel is to be "made known to all nations," so that whosoever will might come to God through Christ, and be saved.

At this point Paul was overwhelmed, as he was at the end of chapter 11, with the infinite wisdom and grace of God. And so the epistle to the Romans concludes with a prayer of doxology--worship and praise to God.

III. THE DOXOLOGY (Rom. 16:27).

All of the work of salvation was designed for the eternal glory of "the only wise God." None but God could have designed a salvation so infinitely glorious and so completely satisfying to Himself. And even our desire to glorify God can only be acceptable to God if it is offered "through Jesus Christ."

But there is another thought here which we must not miss. God is not fully glorified by expressing the words which we find here in verse 27 unless we are living lives which show how He has established us in the Gospel by His mighty power. When we stand against error, when we refuse to give in to the enemies of the Gospel, when we remain faithful in spite of all of the temptations we face in this world, then the doxology that flows from our lips can truly bring the kind of glory to God which He so richly deserves.

Conc: As we read the Word of God day by day, and as we hear the Word taught or see it explained on the printed page, let us pray, too, that the Lord will continue to establish us and all other believers in the truth

that we may stand firmly in the way, and refuse to turn aside regardless of the pressures that may come upon us to do so. Only God can establish us, and Paul here is not only praying for the believers in Rome, but he was also teaching all believers of future generations how dependent we are upon God to establish us in our faith and to keep us walking day by day in the truth of the Word of God. The church today has no greater need today than this. And so as we pray for each other and for believers wherever they may be, let this be the burden of our prayers.

For those of us who teach the Word, let this always be the prayer we pray after we have finished our teaching and want to commit the results into the hands of the Lord.

A PRAYER FOR A GOOD CHURCH TO BECOME BETTER

Philippians 1:9-11

Intro: This is one of the epistles which Paul wrote during his first imprisonment in Rome. The three other epistles which he wrote at that time are Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. We will be looking at the prayers in those epistles next, beginning with Paul's letter to Philemon.

There are not many prayers in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. In fact, there are only four--three very short, one-sentence prayers, plus the one we have in verses 9 through 11 in chapter 1. It is the only one I plan to take up with you. The reason for that is that the three shorter prayers, one in Paul's introduction, and the other two in his conclusion, are prayers we have considered before. (See 1:2; 4:20, 23.)

In the subject I have given to this prayer I have referred to the church at Philippi as "a *good* church," and I believe that there is justification in this epistle for calling the Philippian church, "a good church." I don't mean to imply that this was the only good church Paul wrote to, but he certainly said things in his letter to them that would convince us that Paul was very pleased with the work of the Lord in Philippi. Let me prove this.

See 1:3. (Read.) Then look with me at 2:12. (Read.) And then notice what Paul said in 4:14-16. (Read.)

And then add to this the first statement of the prayer we are considering today. Paul said that he was praying that their love would "abound yet more and more..." This implies that their love was abounding, but Paul was concerned that it would "abound more and more." Their love was good; Paul wanted it to be better.

As I understand this prayer, we do not have several separate requests, but four requests which lead from one to the next. So it seems to me that what we have here is a single request with four parts to it:

- 1) "That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."
- 2) "That ye may approve things that are excellent."
- 3) "That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."
- 4) "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness..."

So Paul was praying that their love might abound in order that ultimately they might be "filled with the fruits of righteousness," etc. And the singular character of Paul's prayer was further indicated by the beginning

of the prayer when he said, "And **this** I pray," instead of saying, "And **for these things** I pray." It was "this," singular, one great burden that was on Paul's heart for the believers in Philippi. But I want to take up the four parts and show how one leads to another.

I. THE BASIC REQUEST (Phil. 1:9). CF. ALSO 1 THESS. 3:12.

The "this" is emphatic, and follows in the light of what Paul had written in verses 3 through 8. It is clear from these verses, especially verses 7 and 8, that Paul had a great love for the believers in Philippi. But as much as he loved them, and rejoiced in the progress spiritually that they had made, he knew that things could get even better than they were. In fact, one translation of the word "abound" is to be the better.

He was concerned about their love. It was not that they were not a loving people, but he wanted them to be even more loving. Love is the basic ingredient of all Christian doctrine, Christian life, and Christian service. You may remember that in our Lord's message to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, even though the Ephesian people were very busy serving the Lord, the Lord was not satisfied with their service because they had left their first love, meaning that they did not love Him as much as they had loved Him in the past, and so their works were deficient. And so he called upon them to repent, and indicated that if things did not change, their light would be removed--meaning that their testimony would be extinguished, and that possibly the church at Ephesus would cease to exist! That happened. Today Ephesus is in ruins, and, of course, the church of Ephesus is gone!

What love was Paul talking about?

Expositors have differed greatly in their interpretation of this point in the prayer. It seems to me when a word like "love" is not particularly identified, the Spirit of God intends that we take it in its widest sense--love in all of their relationships. This would mean their love for the Lord, their love for His Word, their love for His people, their love for the Lord's work, and the same kind of love that the Lord Himself showed toward the world. He was moved with compassion toward the world because they were as sheep not having a shepherd.

You will remember that Paul said, in writing to the Corinthian church at the end of what we now call the love chapter of the Bible, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity" [love]; "but the greatest of these is charity" [love]. Paul meant that if our faith were not the expression of our love for

the Lord, it was a deficient faith. Sometimes we trust the Lord because we can't do anything else, but we don't do it out of love for the Lord. That is faith that is deficient. And the same with hope. Sometimes we say that we wish the Lord would come, but it may not be because we want to see the Lord, but because we want to get out of this messy world that we are in.

The great commandment in the law is that we should love the Lord. A lack of love for the Lord lessens the value of everything else in the eyes of the Lord. Love needs to become the dominant feature of our lives--our love for the Lord, for His Word, for His people, etc. And we can always love the Lord more than we do, and we need to be growing in our love for Him. The same can be said about all of these other areas of our lives. We need to give the greatest priority to love. Our love for each other is what makes our witness to the world powerful. Cf. John 13:34, 35.

But notice that Paul put some restrictions upon this love. It must be "in knowledge and in all judgment."

The word for "knowledge" that Paul used here could more accurately be translated, full knowledge. And "judgment" means discernment and perception. And example of what Paul meant here is that, while we love the Word of God, we don't accept a teacher just because he uses the Word of God. We need to know how he is using the Word. He might be using the Word to teach false doctrine. The most dangerous cults, or the most dangerous false teachers, are those who use the Bible. They use the Bible, but they are teaching anything but the truth.

John MacArthur has recently written a book called, Reckless Faith. The subtitle to the book is, "When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern." That is what Paul was praying about here. The life and power of the professing church today is almost non-existent because there is such a lack of discernment about what we are supposed to be doing as the Lord's people. When you go into a church where the music sounds more like it belongs in a bar, somebody is lacking in discernment. Paul prayed that the love of the Philippian believers would increase, but love must be exercised in the light of the full knowledge of the Word of God, and a loving heart that knows how to discern between what is in agreement with the Word of God, and what is not!

Illus: The mayor's desire to get church leaders together to work on the problems we face in our community. Many pastors are excited about this. I am not because I know that one of the first things that would come up is

to accept homosexuals. In the light of Scripture, that is not love; that is sin! We need to love what God loves, and hate what God hates. We need to seek to bring the truth to homosexuals, but not have anything to do with the idea that they must be accepted as they are. I believe we are already experiencing the judgment of God in many ways in our country, and all because we are ignoring the truth of His Word.

But let me go on to the second point.

II. THE USE OF KNOWLEDGE AND DISCERNMENT (Phil. 1:10b).

We take the knowledge of the Scriptures and the ability to discern between truth and error, right and wrong, which the Holy Spirit gives us, and we "approve things that are excellent." Notice here is something that we need *to do*, some decisions which need to be made.

This expression suggests that we need to make a choice between good things, to determine that which is of more value, that which is more important than other good things. There is a difference, you know, among good things. There are good things, and there are better things. There are good things, and there are excellent things. The NIV translates this expression, "that you may be able to discern what is best."

Let me give you an example. It is found in Luke 10, verses 38 through 42. Listen to what we read there about Martha and Mary:

38 Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

39 And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Was it wrong for Martha to prepare a meal for the Lord? Certainly not! It was very commendable. But if it comes to a choice between preparing a meal, or sitting at the feet of the Lord to hear Him teach, which is the best? If you asked many professing Christians that question, you might be surprised by the answers that you would get. But the Lord made it

very clear that Mary had chosen that which was best. Perhaps the meal could have been served later, but what Martha needed to do was to get where Mary was at that particular time.

We are faced continually with decisions in which we are showing what is most important to us, but it may be that we are not making the most excellent choices that we could--even among good things.

In preparing our lessons, which is most excellent, to read the Word, or to run immediately to the commentaries? We can thank the Lord for the many good books which have been written to help us understand the Word of God, but if those books take the place of the reading of Scripture, and meditation on that Word, we are not taking the most excellent way.

For those of us who know the Lord, the choice is not between good and evil; we know how to make those choices. No, we often lose out in our lives because we choose the good in place of the best. Paul wanted the Philippian believers to choose the best, and that is what God wants. We are to "approve things that are excellent," that is, put them to the test, and they put our stamp of approval on them--which means that they are the things that we are going to seek for our own lives.

Now let us look at the third statement:

III. THE EFFECT OF CHOOSING THE EXCELLENT (Phil. 1:10b).

Up to this point we have been thinking about what we are *to do*. In this third statement we are considering what we will *be* if we are increasing in our understanding of the truth, and making the most excellent choices in our lives: "that ye may be sincere and without offence until the day of Jesus Christ."

"The day of Jesus Christ" is the day when the Lord will come, and take us to glory. See verse 6.

The Greek word for "sincere" actually means tested and approved in the full light of the sun. "Without offence" means that we will live in such a way that we will not only keep ourselves from sin, but we won't be a stumblingblock to anyone else.

What is the light in which our lives are being tested? It is the light of the

Word. But it is also in the Light, Who is Christ. You see, it is not the standards of the church which mark our approval or disapproval with God. More often than not the church itself is corrupted. No, it is the light of the Word of God. It is in the light of what our Lord Jesus Christ is.

Do you believe that such a life is possible? It must be, or Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, would never have prayed such a prayer. The problem is that we often stand condemned in the light of our own consciences even before we get to the Word of God. We need to have consciences which are sensitive to the Word of God. The goal for us in daily living is to be pleasing to our heavenly Father, to our Savior, and to the Holy Spirit. And by the grace of God it is possible for us to live such a life. We not only need to please the Lord, but we need to be kept from causing anyone else to stumble into sin.

Now for the last point:

IV. THE ULTIMATE GOAL (Phil. 1:11).

This is a very important verse. It tells us that such a life is only possible through our Lord Jesus Christ. To try to live a life that is pleasing to God without trusting Christ to be our strength, is the worst of folly. But when we do, we can be "filled with the fruits" or, fruit, "of righteousness." What does this mean?

This is the abundant life about which the Word of God has so much to say. Paul did not want the Philippian believers to experience the life that was theirs in Christ in a limited way, but with the fullness of the life of Christ upon them. It is a life of holiness. It is a life in which the fruit of the Spirit is evident. It is to have the blessings which a life of righteousness always produces in the lives of people who really learn what it is to walk with the Lord.

Conc: How can we have better churches? By having people in them whose primary desire is to be pleasing to the Lord, a people who are pursuing holiness, not just because of what it will mean to us, but especially so that it might bring "glory and praise" to God. We can thank God for all of the blessings He has given us individually, and as a church, but let us never be satisfied with the progress that we have made thus far in our relationship with God. Let us seek, by His grace, to walk on higher ground, to fill our hearts with the Word of God, and then to seek God's blessing in approving the most excellent things that we may bring glory to God, and be a blessing to people wherever we may be.