

(Romans) Romans 15:3-29

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual strength, maturity, and unity in the body of Christ, and how these qualities are essential for following Jesus and fulfilling God's purpose.

Duration: 47:06

Scripture: Romans 1:16, Romans 8:1, Romans 12:3, Romans 13:1, Romans 14:1, Romans 15:3, Romans 15:15

Topics: "Christian Fellowship", "Unity In Christ"

Description

In this sermon on Romans Chapter 15 and verse 3, the preacher emphasizes the importance of fellowship among believers in the body of Christ. He highlights that it is not necessary for everyone to agree on every small doctrine, but rather to have a desire to glorify God. The preacher points out that many Christian groups today fail to fulfill God's will because they do not give place for the teachings of Romans 14 and 15 in their churches. The conclusion of this section is that believers must be filled with knowledge in order to admonish one another and glorify God with one accord and one voice.

Transcript

Let's turn today to Romans chapter 15 and verse 3. In our study of the gospel as explained in Romans by Paul, we could say this is the gospel according to Paul, this letter. We started with man's fallen condition. We saw godless sinners, religious sinners, all guilty, justification by faith, peace with God, being free from sin's power, being free from legalism, life in the Holy Spirit, God's sovereignty, God's faithfulness, God's righteousness, submission to secular authorities.

And we come here in chapter 14 and 15 to fellowship among believers in the body of Christ, accepting one another as Christ has accepted us. We saw in chapter 15 verse 1 in our last study that if we think we are strong, we should be able to bear with the infirmities of the weak. What is the purpose of a pillar? In the olden days, a pillar used to support the whole roof of a building.

We read of Samson's time when two pillars were all that was needed. When Samson pushed them down, the whole building collapsed. So elders in a church are sometimes like those two pillars on which the whole church rests.

And it's not just elders. God's desire is that many, many brothers grow up to become pillars. And what's the purpose of a pillar? A pillar is not meant to be an ornament or a decoration.

A pillar is meant to be something that supports the weight of a building. So this is what it says here. If you are strong like a pillar, you ought to bear the weaknesses of others.

Those are the weights that we need to bear. So nobody should think that they are spiritually strong if you cannot bear with the weaknesses of others. If you get always irritated and upset and agitated with the weaknesses you see in your husband or your wife or some other brother, that's the clearest proof you're not strong yourself.

You're just another weak brother or sister. However much you may imagine yourself to be strong. Romans 15.1 delivers us from a lot of delusions about our being spiritual or spiritually strong.

Here's the mark of a spiritually strong man. He can bear with the weaknesses of people around him. God can bear with the infirmities of everybody in the church because he's so strong.

Now we're not as strong as he is, but we should be becoming stronger. We should not be people who just can't bear any of the weaknesses or lack of faith in others or people having a different opinion on non-essential doctrines. This is the theme here when it speaks about bearing with the weakness of others.

He's not talking about bearing with their anger or things like that. He's talking about bearing with the fact that they don't have the same view as you have on an area where you may be strong. Okay, they don't have that understanding.

Can you bear with them? Or do you get upset and make yourself into an exclusive company? Let each of us please his neighbor, Romans 15.2, for his good. Another mark of spiritual strength and maturity is that you don't just seek your own good. You seek the good of your neighbor.

You seek the good of the other person. You seek his building up, not just your own. And it says in that connection, this verse we were just looking at, verse 3, Christ did not please himself.

We could say that that verse sums up his entire life, just like John 6, 38, where he says, I came from heaven to earth not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. There were many things that Jesus could have done to please himself, but he didn't. His entire life was spent in trying to please his Father.

And if he was tempted sometime to please himself, he would deny himself that. Here is another mark of a spiritual man, a strong man. He does not please himself.

It says here in verse 3, The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell upon me. People who reproached God the Father, their reproaches fell upon Christ. And he was so much in fellowship with the Father that he was willing to bear those reproaches.

Is there any reproach that comes upon you because you are a disciple of Jesus Christ? Jesus suffered reproach during his entire public ministry. Throughout those three and a half years, right from the very first sermon he preached in his hometown of Nazareth, as we read in Luke chapter 4, he was rejected. They almost tried to kill him in the middle of that sermon.

From that time till the time they actually killed him, they were constantly after his blood. And his name was always reproached as a heretic, a false teacher, even though he was doing miracles. And that was part of the reproach that fell upon him because he decided to please his Father.

And we need to ask ourselves, Do you think Christianity is accepted by the world today, true Christianity? Maybe a compromising version is accepted, but true Christianity, just like Jesus Christ, has always been rejected. The true Christ is rejected today just as much as 20 centuries ago because the world system has not changed. The world may have become more civilized, but it's just cunningness.

The wickedness is now concealed, whereas formerly it was open. They wouldn't probably crucify Jesus today because of human rights and things like that, but they'd reject him just as much. It doesn't make any difference.

Christ is rejected by the world today, and there's a reproach in following Jesus that any true disciple of Jesus will have. Any true prophet will be just as much rejected today as he was, as prophets were, throughout human history. So there's a reproach that comes through following Jesus that we must not be ashamed to bear.

That's the mark of a spiritual man. And it says here in verse 4 that whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. And what do we read in the Scriptures in earlier times, like I just mentioned? Stephen said to the high priests and the rulers, the religious rulers of his time, in Acts chapter 7, which of the prophets did you not persecute? There was not a single prophet in the history of Israel who was not considered a heretic and on whom the reproach of God did not come.

On every one of them reproach came. And that's why Stephen could say like that. And Jesus was the last great prophet of that age, the Jews, and they rejected him, God's own son.

And so these things are written for our instruction, for our encouragement, that we might have hope. Don't get discouraged when reproach comes upon you. That's part of the result of receiving the gospel message and submitting totally to it.

But in the midst of all this, God gives us encouragement. Verse 5, May the God who gives perseverance and encouragement. It says here there are two sources of perseverance and encouragement.

It's very important to see that. We need perseverance. We all agree there.

Patience, endurance, to endure until the end. And everyone will certainly agree we all need encouragement. We live in a world where we face so many discouragements that we need every possible source of encouragement.

That's the only thing that will help us to persevere and endure until the end. So, what are the two sources of perseverance and encouragement? First of all, the scriptures, verse 4. The scriptures, it says here through the scriptures, Romans 15, 4, we get strength to persevere because we get encouragement. And the result of that, we have hope.

So, don't let anyone tell you that the scriptures were written to discourage you. If any man preaches God's word in such a way that it discourages you, you can be pretty sure either the fellow is twisting God's word or he doesn't know God's word himself. God's word is written for our encouragement.

Romans 15 is so clear that you got to be blind not to see it. It's clear. Scriptures are written for our encouragement.

And the scriptures are written to give us hope, not to discourage us and make us feel hopeless. Don't ever, ever allow anybody to preach God's word to you in such a way that will discourage you, condemn you or make you feel hopeless. That's a twisting of scripture.

That's probably taking one side of scripture and not showing you the other side. There's a lot of that type of preaching that goes on today, a lot of books and tapes that bring people into bondage. This is wrong.

The scriptures are meant to encourage us and give us hope and to help you to endure till the very end of your life. But the scriptures alone are not enough. You know, we can hear a promise or listen to a challenging message in a meeting and I'm sure you've had this experience.

You hear some powerful anointed speaker give the word of God in such a way that you are greatly encouraged when you listen to it and by the next morning it's all gone. You're back. Your discouragement is sort of sitting on your head once more.

So we need more than the scriptures. And the second source of encouragement, we're told in verse 5, Romans 15, verse 5, is God himself. You see, it's God's word plus God.

Then you'll never have a problem. You may not remember God's word, but if God himself is there, well, he's going to encourage you himself because he can put into your spirit things that energize you, that stir you up. And so it says, may God himself, and that I believe is through the Holy Spirit.

When it speaks about God working inside us anywhere in the New Testament, please remember that's always the Holy Spirit. It's the third person of the Trinity working inside us to give us encouragement. So here is this dual source of encouragement for a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

One is the written scriptures, the promises of God, and the other is the Holy Spirit working within us. And with these two, we need never be discouraged in our whole life. We need never give up.

We're going to persevere, we're going to endure, and we're always going to have hope. It says, may God who gives this perseverance and encouragement, the scriptures that give you perseverance and encouragement, bring you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus. When you get this type of encouragement, what's going to be the result? You're going to be able to bear with that other brother who is different from you.

You're going to have the same mind, even though you don't agree in doctrine. Same mind doesn't mean that we agree in every little doctrine, but it does mean that we have got one spirit, the spirit of Christ. The spirit which doesn't want to please ourselves, but wants to please God.

That is God's purpose, and that is how the body of Christ is going to be built. So let's cooperate with God the Holy Spirit as He seeks to do that work in us. Today we will turn to Romans chapter 15 and verse 5. May the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In our last study, we were seeing the importance of perseverance and encouragement, and here we see the purpose of it all. The ultimate purpose is not just that we live a personal life of happiness and joy. That's part of it.

But in addition, that along with other believers, and in the context we see other believers who don't perhaps exactly have the same view as we have on a number of non-essential doctrines, that we are of the same spirit and the same mind with them. What is that mind? That mind is to glorify God, verse 6. You see, the important thing is not whether you and I agree on one or two particular small doctrines, but whether we want to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you desire that? Do I desire that? Are you born again? Has the Spirit of God come inside you and in me? Then God has made us one, and His purpose is that we might be of that same mind, verse 6, to glorify God.

That we might be with one accord and with one voice glorify Him. That there will be no conflict in our voice. This is God's will.

And we see around in the world today how God's will is not being fulfilled in the vast majority of Christian groups, because people have not given place for the teaching of Romans 14 and 15 in their churches. Even churches that don't think they are cults have begun to behave like cults. Exclusive, unwilling to accept other believers just because of some slight difference of opinion on some doctrine.

So what is the conclusion of this section? Romans 15, verse 7. It's one of the glorious highlights of Romans. One of those wonderful peaks that we come to. It's not the final goal, but we're pretty close to the final goal now.

And that is, accept one another just as Christ also has accepted us to the glory of God. So what is the ultimate purpose of the gospel, as we have seen it so far? That we might be willing to accept one another as Christ has accepted us to the glory of God. That we might not just think of ourselves, but the other person, and seek to be one with Him so that together we can glorify God.

Otherwise God is not glorified. That's the point. And that's the mark of a mature, strong believer, that he can accept others who are different from him.

God allows us, as I said in an earlier study, to have different opinions, to see things in a different way, not to see eye to eye with each other on peripheral, unimportant doctrines, so that our love can be tested. Our love is not tested when you love a brother who sees eye to eye with you in everything. But when a person has a different view from you, and you're still willing to accept him, then you know that you have learned to love with divine love.

And it says here, further, concerning Jesus and how He's uniting the Jews and the Gentiles, this is a great problem of unity in the early church, was always between the Jews and the non-Jews. The Jews despised the non-Jews, and the non-Jews despised the Jews. And the problem of unity always lay between them.

So when He speaks about this unity, the whole context is people who have different views from the Jews, concerning eating food offered to idols, concerning keeping the Sabbath, and things like that. And He says here in verse 8, For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God, to confirm the promises given to the fathers. Jesus became a servant.

We read here, He came to show to the Jews that God is true to His promises, the promises that He gave. But, He says, remember also that He came also for the Gentiles to be saved. The Jews need to remember that.

Jesus wasn't only a servant for the circumcision. He also came for the Gentiles, that they might also glorify God, verse 9, for His mercy. And He says, that's why the psalmist says, and he quotes the Old Testament

Scriptures, which the Jews have in their possession.

The psalmist says, Therefore I will give praise to thee among the Gentiles, and I will sing to your name. And in another place he says, Rejoice, O Gentiles, along with His people, the Jews. See, Paul quotes these Old Testament Scriptures to see, to show how there were Old Testament prophecies, which spoke about the Gentiles rejoicing with the Jews.

And again, he quotes another verse in verse 11, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let everyone praise Him. See, all these Scriptures speak about non-Jews also uniting with Jews in praising God. So we see, this is not an afterthought in God's mind, from the day of Pentecost onwards.

God doesn't have any afterthoughts. He knows the end from the beginning. This was always God's plan.

When He started with the Jews, His purpose was ultimately to get the whole world. And when the Jews became exclusive, they missed out on God's purpose. That's like a church becoming exclusive.

God's purpose in working in the church is to reach out to the whole world. And when a church does not reach out to the whole world, and thinks that we're the only ones whom God's going to bless, they're making exactly the same mistake that the Jews made for 1500 years. And it's amazing that we don't seem to learn anything from history.

The Jews made that mistake and God rejected them. And if we in the church make the same mistake, you can be pretty sure God will reject us too. There's no partiality with God.

God's purpose is to reach others. It's true He blessed the Jews. It says in verse 12, as the prophet Isaiah said, from the root of Jesse, the father of David, he who arises will rule over the Gentiles.

And in him the Gentiles will hope. So he quotes four Old Testament scriptures from the Psalms and from Isaiah in verse 12 to say the one who is coming through Jesse, Jesse is the father of David, that's referring to Jesus, who is he going to rule over? He's going to rule over the Gentiles. And the Gentiles are going to pin their hopes in him alone.

So he says if you're a real Jew and you accept the scriptures, you've got to just accept the fact that all those scriptures were pointing to the day when the Jews and Gentiles would become one in Christ. And he says that day has come. And if you haven't woken up to that fact, you're missing out on what God is doing.

Now we need to apply that today. Today our problem is not Jews and Gentiles. It may be a Christian from another group, another denomination, another language group perhaps, another caste, and there's so many wretched divisions among believers.

Now I can understand the distinction between those who are born again and those who are not born again because no man becomes a Christian by birth. But why should there be break of fellowship and division between those whom God has accepted? Receive one another as Christ has accepted you. Otherwise we make the same mistake that the Jews made for 1500 years, thinking we're the only ones whom God has accepted because of certain special doctrines we have, which those other fellows don't accept.

That's exactly what the Jews said in those early days, some of those legalistic Jews in the early days of Christianity. They said that's okay, maybe these Gentiles will say it, but they can have their own church and we'll have our own because we've got certain rules which they don't have. But that's exactly what a lot

of Christians are saying today.

And then God's purpose is not fulfilled. It's the devil's purposes that are fulfilled when that type of thing happens because it frustrates God's purpose. So Paul makes this tremendous plea for unity between the Jews and Gentiles and that is one of the final goals of the Gospel, that two shall become one.

It was never possible in the Old Testament because the Holy Spirit had not come to dwell within man. Even Jesus' disciples could not become one. At the Last Supper they were all arguing as to who's going to be the next leader after Jesus was crucified.

That's what they were discussing. But now it's different. From the Day of Pentecost onwards it became different.

It says Peter stood up on the Day of Pentecost with the eleven supporting him. They didn't want to speak, they just stood behind and supported him and said to him, well Peter, we're with you 100%. That was different because the Holy Spirit had now come within.

And that was the greater work that Jesus said that his disciples would do after he had gone, John 14, 12, that the Jews and Gentiles would become one, something that had never happened in the history of humanity would now take place. And God's desire is that this wonderful miracle of the Gospel that unites two completely different people into one should be manifested in our midst in every place. It goes on in verse 13 to say, May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

There's a lot of emphasis in all these passages on the power of the Holy Spirit, right from chapter 8 onwards. The Christian life is a life where we're filled with the Holy Spirit and only thus can we live this overcoming life, only thus can we build the body of Christ, only thus can we be united with people who are totally different from us, and only thus can we together with one mouth and one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is called here the God of hope.

God is always a God of hope. Please remember that. If some of you feel that you're too far gone or you're too great a sinner, remember, there's always hope for you as long as you're alive.

The only person for whom there's no hope is the one who is dead and buried. But as long as you're alive, no matter how far you're gone, no matter how greatly you've sinned, there's hope for you. God is the God of hope.

And God is the one who fills us with joy. God is the one who fills us with peace. Notice this emphasis we saw in chapter 14 as well.

The kingdom of God is not only righteousness, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And here it speaks about these important virtues, joy and peace and faith and hope. And all of these, he says, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Without it, it's impossible. Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit so that you can be filled with faith, so that you can be filled with joy, so that you can be filled with peace, so that you can be filled with hope and become an instrument to be used by God to bring unity in the body of Christ. May God help us.

Let's turn today to Romans 15. And verse 14. Paul has just concluded this study on the Gospel and where it finally leads to, the unity of the Jews and the Gentiles.

And he's given them some strong exhortations about the unity, the importance of the Christians in Rome, Jews and Gentiles being one in the church without sticking to their own opinions on non-essential doctrines. Without trying to force those opinions on others. And then, he says these wonderful words of encouragement in verse 14.

Concerning you, my brothers, remember, Paul has never met these brothers in Rome. He's never been in Rome. The church in Rome is established by somebody else.

One of Paul's earlier co-workers was in Rome, Priscilla and Aquila, as we read in chapter 16. And there were others whom he knew who were there, but Paul himself had not seen the church in Rome. It's probably consisted of many hundreds of believers.

And he says to them, concerning you, my brethren, I am convinced that you are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. Now, how in the world could he say that about people whom he had never met? See, our human nature is one that is always suspicious. We prefer to think something bad of people rather than something good.

But you see something so different in Paul's attitude to these Christians. These Christians in Rome were probably not very mature spiritually, but he wants to believe the best about them. And that's the right attitude for a true Christian to have.

He says, I am convinced that you are full of goodness. What an attitude to have! I am convinced that you are full of goodness and I am convinced that you are filled with all knowledge. And therefore, you are able to admonish one another.

And that verse also teaches us the basic qualification that equips us to teach others, to preach in the church or to minister God's word in any way. What do you require to be a preacher of God's word in the church even if you speak for five minutes or fifty minutes? Two things. And both are mentioned in this verse.

Goodness and knowledge. The trouble with a lot of people today who preaches, they have only one of those two. And you know which one it is.

Knowledge. That's sad. Paul mentions goodness first.

Do you want to admonish others like it says here? What a lust there is in our flesh to admonish other people. Good. If you want to admonish them to build up the body of Christ, it's a very good desire.

But make sure you are first filled with goodness. That means you've got a heart that's good towards all those people you want to admonish. And at the same time, if you really want to admonish them, you also need to have knowledge.

Goodness alone is not enough. You need to know the scriptures. In other words, you've got to have goodness in your heart and the scriptures in your mind.

If you've got both, you're going to be an excellent preacher of God's Word. If you've got any one alone, you don't really qualify. Of course, goodness is better than knowledge.

You can be a good brother. But it's ideal to have both. And the most effective servant of God as far as God is concerned, is the one whose heart is filled with goodness to God's people and whose mind is filled with the knowledge of the Word of God.

So, if you find that God is sort of stirring you up to preach and encourage His people with His Word, seek for these two. Devote yourself to have a heart filled with goodness through the Holy Spirit's power to all people. And devote yourself to the study of God's Word so that your mind is saturated with God's Word.

It's a great tragedy that chartered accountants and lawyers know more about their profession than a lot of preachers know about the Bible. It shouldn't be like that. A preacher should know far more about the Bible than any lawyer knows about law and any chartered accountant knows about taxes.

Otherwise, we're unfit to serve God. We must be filled with knowledge. Then we can admonish one another.

And he says in verse 15, Paul says, I've written to you very boldly on some points so as to remind you again because of the grace that's given me from God. This is an expression that Paul uses again and again when he writes to the Romans. In Romans 12.3 he said that, Through the grace given to me, I say to every man, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

Here again he says, What is it that has made me write so boldly to you? Grace was given to me by God. Paul himself is admonishing. But it's a result of grace that God gave him.

And it's only as a result of grace that God gives us that we can also admonish and speak boldly. Apart from grace, we will be just human in our ministry. He says, God gave me grace to be a servant of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles and ministering as a priest the gospel of God that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Now this is a wonderful passage. Paul says here, I'm a servant, a minister to the Gentiles. But primarily, he says, I'm ministering to God, not to people.

Now there's a lot of difference between ministering to people and ministering to God. When we minister to people, we must primarily minister to God. And our service for the people must be our service to God and not just to the people.

That's what we see here. He says, I'm offering up these Gentiles as a priest to God. And I want to make sure that this offering is acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Now this goes back to the Old Testament law where a priest, when a Jew had brought a bullock or a sheep to the priest to offer to God, it was the priest's responsibility to examine that sacrifice. You read in the book of Leviticus to make sure that there was no defect in it. He had to make sure that the sheep or the ox was not sick, that it was not blind or lame.

There was no defect anywhere. That was the priest's responsibility. And we read in the book of Malachi how the Jewish people had backslidden so much.

The priests had backslidden. They were being bribed by these people to offer defective bullocks and sheep to God. And here Paul uses that example and says, when I bring people to Christ and I form a church, and then I have to take that church of believers and offer it to God.

And just like that Old Testament priest, before I offer those believers to God, I have to make sure that there's no defect in any of them. I cannot offer a defective offering to God. That's the point.

How many believers have this type of sense of responsibility to serve the Lord? I wish pastors, preachers, teachers, evangelists would be taken up with this verse. That their service to God, the offering up of the believers who came to the Lord through their ministry would be acceptable to God. That means there would be no defect in them.

In another passage, Paul says in Colossians 1.28, he says, my aim is to present every person perfect in Christ and complete in Christ. That's his goal. He says, that's why I work through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So this is a very important verse. And so he says, because this is my ministry, verse 17, in Christ Jesus, I have found great reason for boasting, but only in things pertaining to God. He says, it's only what God's done through me.

I can boast about a lot of things, but it's not in what I am in myself, but only in things pertaining to God. I wish it were true like that in our life, that if there's anything we can boast about, it is only in the things pertaining to God. And he says, I will never speak, I will not even presume to speak, verse 18, of anything, and notice this, not what I have accomplished, but what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem, as far as the Lyricum, I have preached the full Gospel, fully preached the Gospel of Christ, and thus I aspire to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build on another man's foundation.

Here he says about what Christ has accomplished through us. Now there's a lot of difference between me doing something for God, and Christ doing something through me. There are a lot of people in the world who want to do something or the other for God.

You know that little couplet which says, only one life, and it will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last. It's not strictly true. It would be more correct to say, only one life, and it will soon be past, only what Christ does through me will last, not what I do for Christ.

That's what he's speaking of here. Not what I do for Christ, but what Christ accomplished through me. There are a lot of things I did, which the Lord may never have wanted me to do.

I mean, the angels in heaven don't run around trying to do something or the other for God. They do what God tells them to do. And the Lord told us to pray that His will would be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

So what Christ has accomplished through me, it's Christ who brought the Gentiles to obedience. It's Christ who made them obedient in word and deed. It's Christ who did these wonderful signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit so that the full Gospel was preached from all this one area to the other, so a lot of people were saved.

And He says, I want glory in that. My longing was always to go and preach the Gospel, verse 20, where Christ was already named. He says, I didn't want to go and build on somebody else's foundation.

His calling was to be an apostle, an evangelist, a shepherd, a teacher, a prophet. Paul was everything. Now most of us are not like that.

We usually have one gift. Sometimes we have to build on another's foundation. But in Paul's case, he was unique.

And he went and laid a foundation and built the whole building and put the roof on. And he says it was all done through the power of Christ. He gives all the glory to God for this ministry of his.

Let's follow Paul in this area, though we may not have his ministry, to recognize that if we want to do anything lasting, it has to be in dependence on the Lord and only what He does through us. Let's turn now to Romans, chapter 15, and verse 20. Paul is explaining something about his own ministry as we saw in our last study also.

He has almost completed his description of the Gospel, the Gospel message that ultimately ends in making the Jews and Gentiles into one body. And then he describes something about his own ministry from chapter 15. In verse 15 onwards, followed by a number of greetings in chapter 16.

And in this connection he says about his own ministry, he says, I have aspired to preach the Gospel not where Christ was already named. As I said in our last study, that's because Paul was an apostle and an evangelist. Now, you may not be an apostle or an evangelist, and then you may not have the privilege to go and preach Christ where He is not named.

We cannot follow Jesus or Paul in their ministry. When Jesus told us to follow Him, and when Paul says, follow me as I follow Christ, it's not in their ministry. It's in their life.

We can follow Jesus in the way He lived, in the way He overcame temptation. We can follow Paul in the things He lived for, in the way He followed Jesus in His life. But when it comes to ministry, each of us has a unique slot in the body of Christ.

And we have to fulfill that particular function that we have in the body. In Paul's case, he had a unique function. We could say he was a man with a hundred talents perhaps, not just ten.

And he had the privilege of establishing churches, writing scriptures, doing miracles, being a healer, being a teacher, being an evangelist, shepherd, father, everything. And therefore, his longing was always to go where the gospel had never been preached, to lay a foundation, and not to build on another man's foundation. Now even if that's not our ministry, we still can follow Paul in the faithful way in which he fulfilled his ministry.

And so he follows the scripture, he says, it's written in the Old Testament, they who had no news of him shall see. And they who have not heard shall understand. Paul is so well versed in the Old Testament scriptures that he finds a scripture for the things he does.

It's good to find a scripture for the things that you do. That's a very good practice. Find a scripture to support what you feel you should do.

That's a great encouragement and help to us when we face problems in our work, if we found a scripture as to why we're doing what we're doing. In other words, it's not just some bright idea that came to your head, but something that you find in scripture. So Paul finds a scripture for why he is preaching where

Christ is not already named.

And he says, it's because of this that I have often, verse 22, been hindered from coming to you. He knew that the gospel had already been preached in Rome. Somebody else had laid a foundation there.

There was a wonderful church going there with wonderful believers. And so Paul did not put Rome as a priority in his travel program, because the gospel had already been preached there. And he's trying to explain to these Roman Christians why he did not come.

It's not that where a church has been established, an apostle need not go. But as far as Paul was concerned, because he had this tremendous passion to reach the lost, he was always thinking of some other openings where the gospel, places where the gospel had not been preached. And once there were no such openings available for him, there were still places there, but no openings immediate, no leading from the Lord to go anywhere else, then he thought of going to Rome.

So Rome was a little lower down in his list. That's what he's trying to explain to them. He says, this is the reason I've been often hindered from coming to you, but now, verse 23, with no further place for me in these regions.

That means, he says, I think I've finished my ministry in this area, and I don't have any other leading to go anywhere else, and for many, many years, verse 23, I've had a great longing to come to you. So, when I go to Spain, Spain was a place where the gospel had not yet been preached, and he says, I'm planning to go there, and on my way to Spain, I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you when I have first enjoyed your company for a while. So Paul was making plans to go to Rome, but as we read later on in Acts of the Apostles, he didn't go to Rome the way he intended to.

He went there as a prisoner, and that's when he first met the church in Rome, and his longing to meet them was fulfilled, and he became a great encouragement. We read in the last verse of Acts 28 that he stayed there for two years, encouraged all those who came to him. So his longing was fulfilled, but not exactly in the way and the time in which he expected.

He says, when I go to Spain, I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there. His aim was finally to go to Spain, but he became a prisoner in Rome, and he says, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while, here you see an apostle and a humble man who writes to these very young believers in Rome, saying, when I come into your midst, he doesn't say, well, I'm going to teach you fellows a lot of things. He says, I'm going to enjoy your company.

You see, this is the mark of a godly man. He looks at even the youngest believer, just like a father looks at a newborn baby. A father enjoys the company of his newborn baby.

Go and ask any father. He enjoys the company of a two-year-old. And Paul was a father.

Now, teachers don't enjoy little children because they mess up the floor and cause a lot of nuisance in the classroom. They enjoy grown-up children. If you're a teacher, you only enjoy mature believers, but if you're a father, you enjoy believers of any age.

Paul was a father, and I believe the great need in the Church is for fathers who learn to enjoy the company of believers. Supposing a father's got a retarded child. Do you think the father will enjoy the company of that person? Sure.

But which teacher enjoys a retarded student in his classroom? That's the tragedy in Christendom today. We've got a lot of preachers today who are teachers, not fathers. Paul said that.

He got 10,000 teachers and about one father. That's about the proportion. And that's a sad thing.

But Paul says here, I'm just going to enjoy your company when I come there, and we're going to bless one another. That's what he said earlier in chapter 1. And he says, I'm also going to Jerusalem now to serve the saints there. Paul had so many programs in his travel plan.

But wherever he went, one thing was true, he was only going to serve. Why was he going to Jerusalem? He was going there to take some money for the poor people in Jerusalem. He says, I'm going to Jerusalem to serve the saints there because Macedonia and Achaia, that means the churches in Philippi and Corinth, have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

And they were pleased to do so and they are indebted to them. He says, Well, the churches in Philippi and Corinth received spiritual blessing from Jerusalem where the church was born. And so, they have a debt.

When people bless you spiritually, you have a debt to bless them materially if you have money. And since the Philippians and Corinthians had some money, I mean, they were not rich. The Macedonians and the Philippians were pretty poor, but they were better off than the people in Jerusalem who were going through a tremendous struggle financially.

And these poor believers in Macedonia decided to make a contribution for those who were still poorer than them. Sometimes poor believers feel, We don't have anything to give. We are poor ourselves.

But do you know there are poor believers who are still poorer than you? And that's what we see here. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia made this contribution. And if the Gentiles, he says, verse 27, shared in their spiritual things, they are certainly indebted to minister to them in material things.

Now, this is a principle that is emphasized many times in the New Testament. That we must recognize our debt. Has somebody ministered to you spiritually? Do you have an abundance materially? Then you are indebted to that man if he is struggling financially and he is poor and you have been blessed spiritually through his ministry.

You need to bless him materially. That's the way there is equality. He blesses you spiritually and you bless him materially.

Now, this is not to encourage you to line the pockets of these well-to-do preachers nowadays who go around taking advantage of scriptures and take money from poor people to live in grand style themselves. I am not talking about that at all. I am talking about poor sincere servants of God who are serving Him in difficult places and living extremely simply and whose ministry has blessed you.

It says here, if you have shared in their spiritual things, you are indebted to minister to them in material things. Now, I mention this because generally speaking in our country, we hardly ever think about that. Very few people think about that.

But this is something spiritual. And so, he says here in verse 28, Once I have finished that and I have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. So, he still got his goal set for Spain and he says, Once I have gone to Jerusalem and given this money to those people and taken care of their

needs.

You see, Paul was a man who was not only concerned about people's spiritual needs. He had such a burden for the poor struggling saints in Jerusalem to make sure that they were OK financially. I believe a true apostle is like that.

He is concerned even about the financial, physical, material welfare of God's people because after all they need money to live. And Paul was concerned that those poor believers in Jerusalem needed some money, many of those poor people and he was going to personally go and take it to them. And he says, After that I will come to you in verse 29.

I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Now, how could Paul say that? How was he so cocksure that when he came to Rome he was going to come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. What a wonderful expression! To come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

He was sure of that because his conscience was clear. Because his motive was good. The glory of God.

And when our motive is good and our conscience is clear and we are filled with the Holy Spirit we can have the assurance that wherever we go rivers of living water will flow from us. We will go in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. This is the way we should move around this world.

That all who come across us wherever we meet them whether we go to them or they come to us they taste something of the fullness of the blessing of Christ from our lives.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/9/SID9093.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/romans-romans-153-29/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net