

We Are Partners In Faith

Romans 1:8-15

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Introduction: Paul had not been to Rome when he wrote this letter to them, but he already knew several things about them. He knows for instance that he is writing to men and women that Christ loves.

Romans 1:7 ⁷ to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like Paul they have been called. There is a lot in this little description. It does not just describe 1st century Roman believers but is the hallmark of Christians throughout the ages. It is true of you and me. It is Jesus....the Good Shepherd....who comes calling to His lost sheep.

John 10:27-29 ²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.

The word call implies more than an invitation. When Jesus calls men they follow Him. It is not a call that can be ignored. It what Christians refer to as an effectual call. I can call you all day long to follow Christ, but when Jesus calls you, you actually will. Why, because Christ's sheep hear and recognize His voice and they follow Him.

These believers, like you and me have been called by Christ to be saints. The Catholic definition of "saint" is a complete fabrication. The word itself means "set apart" for something special and important. Ladies....you have dishes and crystal that you would never dream of serving three year olds on. Why? It is for special occasions. For a special purpose. A saint is not someone who does miracles. The miracle is that God would call you and make you His child. Your salvation and your love for Christ....that is the miracle. Paul experienced that dramatically on the Damascus Road while most believers have a less spectacular call to follow....but we all have one. You don't need to try to remember it. If your heart is open to Christ and you want Him to rule your life and guide your steps then you have heard Him call. This is the grace of God on display. We who cannot hear or see, have both heard and seen Jesus Christ....and both are His doing.

Ephesians 2:4-5 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

2 Corinthians 4:6 ⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Why am I preaching this sermon: With this sense of connection and common experience motivating him, Paul begins to reveal his heart toward these believers. It is the heart of a shepherd. An under shepherd who works for The Chief Shepherd in His absence. I want you to see it in Scripture today so that you will recognize it in real life.

Tragically we live in an age where seminaries are turning out CEO's of million dollar corporations rather than lowly shepherds. Management and Public Relations skills are the prized skills of 21st century pastors. But Paul was called and tasked to shepherd Christ's other sheep. He has introduced himself and identified with them fully as one who has received grace and been called by Jesus. Now he reveals his heart toward them.

Romans 1:8-15 ⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. ⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰ always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

No one should have to guess what I plan to talk about: Paul is excited that the world is talking about the faith of Roman believers. He wants them to know that he himself prays for them constantly. He prays that he will be able to see them....to fellowship with them and to shepherd or feed them with some of the abundant food God has given him. He knows they will encourage him because they are brothers and sisters of Christ. They have received the same grace, the same love, the same call and the same Holy Spirit. They are partners in faith and the great apostle is looking forward to the spiritual blessings these believers were going to impart to him.

Romans 1:8 ⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

I thank my God: Paul reveals at the very beginning of this treatise on salvation that it is personal. Can you imagine Satan being able to say this? Of course not! Belief in God is meaningless to God. Paul does not have mere belief in the existence of a God. 90% of humanity believes there is a God. God is his God and he is God's possession.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.

Through Jesus Christ for you all: "Through" means "through the means of." In other words Paul is only able to call God "his God" and to give thanks for the Romans because of what Jesus Christ has done for him. This is an astonishing admission of dependence. Paul would not even be able to pray for the Romans if it had not been for Christ.

Hebrews 10:19-22 ¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world: There are a couple of ways to look at this statement. Let me start with what is not being said. God is not saying that the whole world was talking about how awesome the Roman believers were. This would be totally at odds with what Paul just said about why he was even able to pray. It is certainly contradicted by the entire rest of the book.

Faith is the Greek word for “trust” and TRUST must have an object. If I say to you, “I trust”.....what will you say? Sure...”Trust What?” Our faith or trust is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul is going to explain this to the Romans more precisely than anywhere else in the Bible. His goal will be to annihilate everything else men trust in for salvation....I MEAN EVERYTHING!

Romans 3:23-28 ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷ Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Their faith was not a system of doctrine or ritual. It was not their religion! It was their trust in Jesus Christ alone for their eternal salvation. If men were talking about the faith of the Romans in all the Roman world they were talking about trust in Jesus Christ. Paul was excited about that and grateful to God for saving these dear brothers through faith in Jesus.

Romans 1:9-10 ⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰ always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you: “If you could ask God, He would tell you how I am constantly praying for you.” Paul says that he serves God in his inner man and not just outwardly. The motives of his heart that are hidden from men but in plain view of God are to serve God by proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.

What is the Gospel? It has nothing to do with what you do for Christ. Becoming more moral or trying to live like Jesus or even doing good works to transform our culture. These things characterize those who believe the gospel but are NOT THE GOSPEL. The Gospel is WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR YOU!!!

Christ left His Eternal place at the Father's side to become a human man, live a sinless life and then die a sinner's death. The faith in the gospel is abandoning everything else you have ever trusted in for salvation and trusting only in the sinless person and work of Jesus Christ on your behalf. Paul's service was to make this reality about Jesus Christ known. IT is really very precise and simple, but it is resisted by all religion and unbelief alike. Men simply insist that they have some righteousness of their own that God will and must acknowledge. Paul explains the gospel in his testimony to the Philippians...

Philippians 3:8-9 ⁸ I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,

Always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you: Paul is praying for God to open the way for him to go to Rome. He is bound to these people and he knows it. He has something in his possession that they need....knowledge of Christ and the prophets. He has tried again and again

Romans 1:11 ¹¹ For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;

For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established: Paul's prayer for the Romans reveals a recurring theme in the New Testament. Remember...Paul was serving God, not outwardly only, but from the heart! He was doing it by telling, proclaiming, explaining the truth about who Jesus Christ was and what He did for men. If you are serving God inwardly by preaching Christ then who are you serving outwardly. The people to whom you preach.

So here is the New Testament Principle of Service. If you get your mind and heart around this you can and will become a dedicated servant of Jesus Christ. All service to God is service to others. When we testify to anyone that Jesus will take their sin and give them eternal life...that is service to God.

Acts 17:24-25 ²⁴ "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things;

But Paul speaks of a particularly dear service that we can offer to Christ. It is the love and care for His other children in the family of God which is the church. Paul knows that God has given gifts to His children. As humans we receive certain abilities and aptitudes from our earthly fathers. They are in our shared DNA.

Romans 1:12 ¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

That I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine: God likewise has shared His spiritual life DNA with His children. The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts in a supernatural way. They are not learned and should not be sought. They should be discovered.

1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, 12 ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good..... ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. ¹² For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Paul alludes to something he will teach in chapter twelve. He knew the Romans had received treasured abilities from Christ that would minister to him. He was not coming just to give them something but to receive something he needed from them. If you are not doing something to help, encourage, strengthen, unburden or even just love on another believer then you are missing this God given and universal blessing. You can serve Christ starting this very hour. Find something to do for another believer and do it with all your heart.

Romans 12:4-6 ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*:

Paul is close to Rome. Just a little more than 600 miles. But, he has an offering that he absolutely must take back to Jerusalem. The people there are starving because the Jews and Romans are persecuting the church and taking away their property and denying them jobs. Paul has the offering and it is really important to him that the Romans do not think he does not want to see them. He says....

Romans 1:13 ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far)

So that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles: Sometimes fruit means character qualities like love, peace, joy and patience. [Gal. 5:22] Or... Paul could mean that he wants to see converts. There is probably some of both ideas. The preaching of the Gospel is not just for one or the other. The constant preaching of Christ and who He is, is transforming. The Holy Spirit takes the presence of Christ and uses it to transform our character into His.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

When Christ is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit then men are saved and they are transformed. This is the fruit that Paul hopes for when he comes. It was his expectation!

Romans 1:14 ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

Under obligation means “I am a debtor.” This is a little hard to swallow for most people and yet they automatically act like debtors when disaster strikes. People give away their food and blankets and spare rooms after hurricanes and earthquakes. Many people instinctively know that if you have food and the person next to you does not, you will share. The human resistance to this is probably best summed up by Cain when he said to God...”Am I my brother’s keeper?” What is the answer to that question by the way? It is “YES! You are!”

If we humanly feel obliged to pull a child from a burning car or jump into a river to save a drowning family, what is our obligation when we are in possession of Eternal Life in Christ? Paul’s understanding was twofold I believe. He was obliged to the wise Greeks and the foolish barbarians because he had in his possession the only hope of eternal life and salvation in creation. In this sense we too are all obligated to share what we possess.

Paul was also under particular obligation to Gentiles because Jesus had called him and appointed him as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Ephesians 3:8 ⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

There is one other sense in which you are in debt. You are a debtor to God because you did not earn or deserve your salvation or anything else you have. These are gifts of grace from God. Grace is undeserved. Paul even describes his ability to preach and understand the Scripture as a grace.

Romans 12:3 ³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

In fact when God’s Word speaks of gifts of service, it calls them “graces.”

1 Corinthians 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

Anytime I do something for a brother or sister I am using grace from God to do it. Let me put this another way. When I witness, love someone, give money, give time, give my heart I make a withdrawal from God’s account. Whenever I exercise patience or ask for Joy, love or peace from God I am making a withdrawal from His infinite storehouse. These are the products or fruits that the Holy Spirit produces.

Galatians 5:22-23 ²²the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control;

I never make a deposit into that account...only ever a withdrawal! That is because I have an entirely different character than that. Mine are broken and fallen and sin soaked. My human good is the work of God in me.

Galatians 5:19-21 ¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these,

So the more Paul served Christ in the Spirit the more he withdrew. He was hopelessly in debt to G and becoming more so every moment. But....Jesus paid our debts and continues to do so as He perfects us and conforms us to His image.

Romans 1:15 ¹⁵ So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Paul wants to pay his debt, while at the same time knowing that he will only continue to incur more. He owes everything to Christ and has no means to pay Him a dime. In fact God owns everything in creation and so neither wants nor need Paul's service.

CONCLUSION: And so it is with you and me as well. We owe everything we have to Christ. If you know this you know that you are a poor man living in the house of the Sovereign King of Creation. Is it any wonder that Paul was not only willing, but even anxious to call himself the slave or bond-servant of Jesus Christ? We owe Christ and yet Christ gives everything continually to us.

Answer this Questions: This hunger to serve others is a hallmark of those who know that they owe their physical and eternal lives to Jesus Christ alone. They count all their own works a loss. This is what Paul the lawyer, Religious Teacher and scrupulously righteous Pharisee came to understand and share with you today.

Philippians 3:7 ⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Ask for a verdict: You too are a debtor who cannot repay in kind. Christ had what you needed and freely gave it to you knowing full well that you could never repay. We do not possess life in ourselves as Christ does and we are by nature hopelessly broken and separated from God. This is why Jesus said...

Mark 10: 45 "... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

So the debt is never paid nor can it be, but those who know and embrace this Gospel of Christ will gladly pay the payments while agreeing with the Scripture which says....

Romans 11:33-36 ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ³⁵ Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.