

# Eager to Preach the Gospel

## Sermons on Romans # 2

*Texts: Romans 1:8-15; Isaiah 49:1-7*

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Paul had never met the Christians in Rome to whom he is writing, but he has heard much about them. Their great faith is widely reported throughout the churches, and Paul knows that his visit will be a great encouragement to them. But meeting the Roman Christians will certainly be a great encouragement to him as well! And so Paul longs to visit Rome to impart to them a spiritual gift to strengthen them. More importantly, Paul is eager to come to Rome and preach the gospel.

The opening chapter of Romans begins with Paul's salutation or word of greeting to his reader in verses 1-7, followed by a series of personal remarks to the congregation in verses 8-15. Last time, we made our way through the first four verses of Romans 1, and this time we will finish up Paul's salutation (vv.5-7), before we work our way through Paul's comments about his hoped-for ministry in Rome.

Recall that in Romans 1:1-4, Paul emphasized his calling as apostle to the Gentiles. He has been called and set apart by Jesus Christ for the sake of the gospel, a gospel which God had promised beforehand through Moses and the prophets. Indeed, the very gospel which Paul has been set apart to preach, was first promised in Genesis 3:15, immediately after the fall of the human race into sin. That same gospel was revealed with ever-increasing clarity throughout the Old Testament, until, when, in the fullness of time, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, under the law, to redeem those under the law (cf. Galatians 4:4). It was that same redeemer promised throughout redemptive history, Jesus Christ, who appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road and called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

Therefore, Paul's gospel is centered in the person and work of Jesus, "*who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*" The same Savior who appeared to Paul and set him apart for the gospel, is not only fully human and can trace his ancestry all the way back to David, Israel's greatest king, but by virtue of his resurrection from the dead, Jesus' divine sonship is vindicated by the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that Jesus Christ not only fulfills all of the Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel's Messiah, but he is also God in human flesh. The incarnation is hardly a theological curiosity. It is essential to Paul's gospel. The Savior must be fully human to be identified with Adam's fallen race. He must be God to offer a payment sufficient to remove human sin.<sup>1</sup>

Paul is also emphatic that the truth of his gospel hinges upon Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead. Jesus' resurrection is the vindication of his messianic ministry, and constitutes the first fruits of a great harvest yet to come. When Jesus Christ conquers death and the grave, this ensures the subsequent resurrection of all of those who are united to him by faith. Furthermore, his resurrection marks the dawn of a new age of salvation which will one day bring about the consummation of all things when our Lord returns to judge the world, raise the dead and make all things new. Christ's resurrection is not only the foundation of Paul's gospel, it marks the birthday of the new creation, in which we, as God's people, even now are privileged to participate through word and sacrament.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q 35/40

As we turn to our text, beginning in verse 5, it will become apparent that Paul's focus subtly shifts from the objective nature of the gospel—that is, what God has done in history for sinners in the person of his Son—to the application of that gospel to each Christian believer. Through the preaching of the gospel, God summons forth the response to that gospel, which is faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul puts it this way in verse 5, *“Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”* In these words, Paul reiterates an earlier point that it was through Christ's call and for Christ's ultimate glory, that Paul had received grace (which is God's unmerited favor) and apostleship (the specific office to which he is called).<sup>2</sup> Paul was not seeking the office of apostle. None of this grows out of personal ambition. Rather, it was Christ's gracious call of Paul, which set him apart and equipped him for his apostolic commission. The goal is that Christ, not Paul, receives all glory. Because Paul has been called to this office, he, in turn, is commissioned to *call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith*. Paul was called by Christ so that he might call Gentiles to faith.

The phrase translated by the NIV as *“the obedience that comes from faith,”* like many others we will find throughout Romans, is not only highly significant, but its meaning is hotly disputed. While there are a number of ways this phrase can be interpreted, only two of them are germane to our discussion.<sup>3</sup> One way to interpret this phrase is to understand Paul to be speaking of “a believing obedience,” as in the NIV: *“the obedience that comes from faith.”* Understood in this way, the gospel summons us to a faith which is obedient, to a faith that “obeys” God's commandments. If this is the case, then Paul is echoing James 2:14-24, where James states that we are justified by a living faith, this is, a faith accompanied by good works.

The other way to interpret this phrase is to understand that for Paul, the gospel itself summons us to faith. This is why both the NASB and ESV translate this phrase (correctly, I might add), as the “obedience of faith.” Understood in this way, Paul is saying that we obey the summons of the gospel—the command to believe that gospel when it is preached—when we believe. Thus it is the act of faith, not any works which follow, which constitutes the obedience spoken of by Paul. The former interpretation is generally that of Rome,<sup>4</sup> while Reformed theologians have usually insisted upon the latter.<sup>5</sup> While Paul will go on to

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<sup>2</sup> The plural *elabomen* is probably a writer's plural, as a more formal way of stating something which can be more informally stated by the singular. Cf. Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.65.

<sup>3</sup> According to Cranfield, it is possible to understand the phrase in any of the following ways: 1) “Obedience to the faith,” the *fides quae creditur*, that is the faith believed, the body of doctrine accepted. 2) “Obedience to faith,” that is, the authority of faith. 3) “Obedience to God's faithfulness attested in the gospel.” That is, God is worthy to be believed. 4) “Obedience which faith works” (works as a fruit of faith). 5) “The obedience required by faith” (works as a proof of faith). 6) “Believing obedience” (“faith that works,” according to James). 7) “The obedience which consists in faith” (the proper response to the demand to repent and believe is to do exactly that. Obedience in this case, would be to believe, or trust in God). Options 1-3 assume the genitive is objective, 4-5, that it is subjective, 6, that it is adjectival, and 7, that it is a genitive of apposition as in Romans 4:11, “the sign of circumcision,” (cf, BDF.sec. 167). See, Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.66

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Joseph Fitzmyer, Romans: The Anchor Bible, Vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 237-238. According to Fitzmyer, “*hypakoe pisteos* is exegetical or appositional, i.e., faith

connect sanctification to the same act of faith which the gospel summons forth, in Romans 1:5, however, the apostle is making the point that the proper (indeed the only) response to the call of God which comes in and through the gospel, is to believe Jesus Christ who is the Son of God by virtue of his resurrection.

One commentator notes that “the equivalence for Paul of faith in God and obedience to Him may be illustrated again and again in this epistle. Paul’s preaching is aimed at obtaining from his hearers true obedience to God, the essence of which is a responding to His message of good news with faith. It is also true to say that to make the decision of faith is an act of obedience toward God and also that true faith by its very nature includes in itself the sincere desire and will to obey God in all things.”<sup>6</sup> John Murray adds that, “faith is regarded as an act of obedience, of commitment to the gospel of Christ.”<sup>7</sup> Calvin says: “We are to note here also the nature of faith. It is referred to as obedience, because the Lord calls us by the gospel, and we answer him by faith as he calls us. So, on the other hand, the source of all our willful disobedience is unbelief. . . . Faith is properly that by which we obey the gospel.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, believing the gospel, is obeying the summons of God contained in the gospel.

This understanding of the phrase, “the obedience of faith,” also fits with perfectly our Lord’s words, who when asked in John 6:28, “*what must we do to do the works God requires?*” answered in verse 29, “*the work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent.*” According to those Reformed writers we have just cited, the works which result from faith are not the obedience of which Paul is here speaking. To believe the gospel when it is preached, it to obey the summons attached to it, the so-called evangelical imperative to “repent and believe.” When we believe in Jesus Christ, we have obeyed the gospel.

In verses 6-7, Paul now connects his own calling with those in the church in Rome. Paul reminds his readers that because they have been called by God and obeyed that call through faith, they are likewise set apart for God’s specific purposes. Paul puts it this way: “*And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.*”

Paul does not conceive of his own apostolic calling in isolation from the calling of other members of Christ’s church. Paul has been called by Christ to be an apostle, and is set apart for God’s own purpose, which is to preach the gospel. But all Christians are similarly called to various positions and offices in Christ’s church, and by virtue of that call, they also belong to Christ (as bond-servants), who is their creator and Lord. Just as is the case with Paul, this calling is in no way based upon anything good or virtuous within them, which serves as the basis for that call. Instead, Paul is emphasizing the fact that it is not believers who love God, but that God loves them, that it is God who calls them, and this calling is

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that manifests itself as obedience.”

<sup>5</sup> See the comments from Norman Shepherd in his recent book Call of Grace, where this text is cited as a proof-text for Shepherd’s view that membership in the covenant entails both privilege and responsibility, simultaneously. Cf. Norman Shepherd, The Call of Grace (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2000), p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.66

<sup>7</sup> John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (NICNT), pp. 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 18.

connected to his love.<sup>9</sup> This means that all Christians have been called to faith by God through the gospel. In this call, God's grace is manifest, because God calls people who are dead in sin, who are filled with all manner of evil desires, who can do nothing to save themselves, and who deserve nothing but judgment. The only reason anyone here this morning is a Christian is because God has called you to faith in Jesus Christ. This is because he is loving and gracious and not because you deserved it or earned it.

It is also clear that Paul's doctrine of calling grows directly out of the messianic expectations of the Old Testament. In Isaiah 49:1-7 (our Old Testament lesson), the prophet speaks of a time in the future in which the gospel will go out to the ends of the earth and bring great blessings to the nations. *"Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. . . I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."* <sup>7</sup> *This is what the LORD says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."*

The coming of the Messiah is connected to the fact that those Gentile nations which formerly oppressed God's people, are now called to join them as worshipers of God. Jesus Christ, who is the true servant of YHWH spoken of by Isaiah, is the light to the Gentiles and will call his chosen ones to faith. His messianic kingdom will crush empires and convert princes. Therefore, when Paul reminds the church in Rome that the sovereign God has called them to faith in Israel's Messiah through the gospel, Paul is bearing witness to the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The capital of the world's greatest pagan empire, is now home to a Christian church, full of Gentiles from distant lands, who worship Israel's God. It is quite amazing, although it is easy for us, living two thousand years later, to miss the significance of this.

Furthermore, Christ's call of sinners through the gospel, has a particular goal or purpose. Those who obey the call of the gospel through faith are also called to be holy. The term which appears in the NIV as "saints" comes from the Greek term [ἅγιοις - *hagios*], or "holy." The primary meaning of *hagios* throughout the New Testament is that by virtue of God's call, Christian believers are now *set apart* for God's own purposes. It is because God has called us through the gospel that we are now regarded as "holy." Personal holiness is not Paul's primary focus here, although the transformed lives of those called to be saints is certainly a consequence of God's call.<sup>10</sup>

But in no sense is our own holiness the basis for our calling. In fact, any true holiness we manifest is the *effect* of God's call and the fruit of our justification, our right-standing before God. This means that everyone who is called to faith in Jesus Christ through the gospel is set apart for God's purpose and is both declared holy (justification), and then progressively made holy (sanctification). Every Christian is a rendered a "saint" by virtue of God's gracious call. Thus the title *saint* is not reserved for those few who manage to attain great levels of personal holiness, as erroneously taught by the Roman Church.

Throughout Paul's writings, sanctification is discussed from two different perspectives, definitive and progressive sanctification. It is from texts such as Romans 1:7, where Paul calls all Christians "saints," that we speak of what is called "definitive sanctification." Definitive sanctification simply means that

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<sup>9</sup> Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.69.

<sup>10</sup> Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.70.

because of God's gracious call of an individual to faith, that individual is now united to Jesus Christ, who is our sanctification. In I Corinthians 1:30, Paul writes: "*It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness [hagiosmos] and redemption.*" In other words, every believer in Jesus Christ receives all of his saving benefits, and has the guilt of their sin paid in full by the death of Christ. Believers have been declared righteous because Christ's perfect righteousness has been credited to them through faith. Because of this "right-standing," believers said to be holy [*hagios*] or saints, by virtue of their union with Christ. We have received the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ himself. The question then, is "can a person who has been reckoned righteous become any holier through their own works after they already possess the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ?" The answer, of course, is no! Christians are already regarded as *hagios*. They are saints or "holy." This is what we mean when we speak of definitive sanctification.

Paul speaks of definitive sanctification in other texts as well. In I Corinthians 1:2, Paul writes "*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy.*" Here we have definitive sanctification clearly in view: "sanctified" is a perfect passive participle, meaning that the believer is presently in the state or condition of sanctification. He is already sanctified. Later Paul reminds these same Christians that "*you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified*" (1 Corinthians 6:11). This time Paul uses the aorist tense, indicating completed action. "*You were sanctified.*" In Ephesians 5:25, Paul tells us that "*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*" The death of Christ removes the guilt of his people, making them holy and clean. Based upon such texts, John Murray concludes, "we are thus compelled to take account of the fact that the language of sanctification is used with reference to some decisive action that occurs at the inception of the Christian life, and one that characterizes the people of God in their identity as called effectually by God's grace."<sup>11</sup> To speak of sanctification in a purely progressive sense, is to badly miss the mark.

The second aspect of sanctification is called "progressive" sanctification. Here the focus shifts to sanctification as a life-long process in which the believer is conformed to the image of Christ by virtue of their union with him. Because we died with Christ and been raised with him in his resurrection (Romans 6:5-7), so too, are we commanded to daily die to sin and daily rise to newness of life. In progressive sanctification the new man is continually strengthened while the sinful nature (indwelling sin or the "flesh") is progressively subdued. Paul will address this topic later on in Romans 6-8.

One final point from the salutation is Paul's greeting in verse 7, "*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*" This and similar formulas are found throughout Paul's letters.<sup>12</sup> In one sense, these words sum up the things God reveals in the gospel. Grace is God's unmerited favor towards sinners, demonstrated in the cross of Jesus Christ. Peace is a common Semitic greeting and may be connected to the fact that in the cross, God both reconciles himself to sinners and sinners to himself.

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<sup>11</sup> John Murray, "Definitive Sanctification" in Collected Writings of John Murray Volume 2: Systematic Theology (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), pp. 277-284.

<sup>12</sup> cf. I Thessalonians 1:1; II Thessalonians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; I Corinthians 1:3; II Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:2; 6:23; Colossians 1:2 Philemon 3; I Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4, and II Timothy 1:2— compare these with James 1:1; II Peter 1:2 and II John 3.

All of these things come to us through the gospel.<sup>13</sup> There is a strong Christological element here as well, for Paul speaks of God and Christ as not only equals, but in some sense as one.<sup>14</sup> In Romans 9:5, Paul will make this connection much more explicitly, when he speaks of Christ as “God over all.”

**I**n Romans 1:8-15, we come to a series of personal remarks which Paul makes to his readers, which tell us about the Roman church, Paul’s reason for writing, his future plans, and his passion to preach the gospel.

It was accepted practice in the Greek-speaking world of the first century for someone writing a letter to invoke the blessings of the gods upon the recipient. While Paul follows the conventional literary format, in organization of the letter, the character and contents of his personal remarks are anything but conventional. Paul does not speak about the health and prosperity of the recipient. He does not invoke the “gods.” Instead, he speaks of the fact that the faith of his readers is being reported everywhere throughout the church, and that this news stirs his pastor’s heart.<sup>15</sup> As he puts it in verses 8-10: “*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.*”

Paul begins his personal remarks by thanking God for the faith of the Roman church. Although it is easy to overlook, Paul’s remarks indicate the deep character of his relationship with God. When Paul speaks of “my God” (cf. Philippians 1:3, Philemon 4), it is as if the apostle were saying, “I am his and he is

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<sup>13</sup> Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.70.

<sup>14</sup> According to B. B. Warfield, these doxologies are very significant: “In the opening sentence of the very first of Paul’s letters [I Thessalonians, according to Warfield] which have come down to us -- and that is as much as to say, in the very first sentence which, so far as we know, he ever wrote -- he makes use of a phrase in speaking of the Christians’ God, which at once attracts our interested attention....It is quite clear that this compound phrase was not new on Paul’s lips, coined for this occasion. It bears on its face the evidence of a long and familiar use, by which it had been worn down to bare bones. All the articles have been rubbed off, and with them all other accessories; and it stands out in its baldest elements as just ‘God Father and Lord Jesus Christ.’ Plainly we have here a mode of speaking of the Christians’ God which was customary with Paul....It would not be easy to exaggerate the closeness with which the two names are knit together in this formula. The two persons brought together are not, to be sure, absolutely identified. They remain two persons, to each of whom severally there may be activities ascribed in which the other does not share....But their equalization is absolute. And short of thoroughgoing identification of persons the unity expressed by their conjunctions seems to be complete....In these passages the conjunction, in which God and Christ are brought together in the general formula which we are investigating, reaches its culmination in an express identity of them. We have seen that the two are not only united in this formula in terms of complete equality, but are treated in some sense one. See, B. B. Warfield, “God Our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” in Biblical Doctrines, pp. 213-231.

<sup>15</sup> Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.73.

mine.”<sup>16</sup> A Rabbi would never speak of YHWH in such intimate terms. But as a Christian, Paul can speak of God in such intimate terms because of his union with Christ, God’s son. While it is the faith of the Roman Christians which stirs his heart, Paul does not direct his thanksgiving to his readers, but instead to God, who has, in his grace, given these Christians their great faith.

Imagine that you are a first-century Christian living somewhere in the Roman empire. It would be a great encouragement to hear about the faith of Christians who were living in the heart of the great pagan empire. In the midst of the darkness of pagan Rome, the faithful shine forth as a beacon. It is Calvin who reminds us “that Paul commends their faith in such a way as to imply that it had been received from God. From this we learn that faith is the gift of God. If thanksgiving is the acknowledgment of a benefit, whoever thanks God for faith, acknowledges that it is his gift.”<sup>17</sup> The notion that faith is a gift is common in Paul’s writings and we should take Paul to mean the same thing here (cf. Romans 10:14-17; Ephesians 2:8-10).

When Paul invokes God as his witness, he is, in effect, swearing an oath demonstrating his own sincerity in what he is about to say. He also goes on to speak of serving God using the verb, [λατρεύω; *latreuō*], which is used in throughout the New Testament in a religious sense. Such service may consist of act of worship or duties of an overtly religious nature. But unfortunately, the NIV obscures the Greek text here. The NIV translates the phrase (*en to pneumati mou*) “in my spirit,” as “with my whole heart.” The Greek phrase “in my spirit” likely refers to Paul’s inward duties, constantly remembering the Roman Christians in prayer (9b), while Paul’s outward mode of service (“I serve”) indicates Paul’s duty to preach the gospel of Christ. Inwardly, Paul constantly prays for his readers, outwardly, he serves them by preaching the gospel of Christ to them.<sup>18</sup> This means that Paul’s calling is comprehensive. His entire life is one of service to Christ, his master, whether it be praying for the churches or preaching the gospel to them.

Paul also expresses his heart-felt desire to get to Rome, “if it be the will of God.” Little did Paul know that his desire will be realized in a manner beyond his comprehension. He will be arrested in Jerusalem and later write from Rome in chains. Indeed, Paul will die some ten years later in Rome as a martyr for Jesus Christ under the cruel oppression of Nero.

As he concludes his personal remarks in verses 11-15, Paul explains his reasons for being so eager to get to Rome. *“I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. 14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.”*

One reason Paul desires to visit the church in Rome is to impart to them a spiritual gift for the building up of the church. What does Paul mean by a “spiritual gift”? The term [χάρισμα, *charisma*] has three basic meanings in the Book of Romans. In Romans 5:15 it refers to God’s gracious gift of salvation in

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<sup>16</sup> Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.76-77.

Jesus Christ—“*the gift [charisma] is not like the trespass.*” In Romans 11:29, Paul uses the plural to speak of God’s gracious gifts to Israel—“*God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.*” And then in Romans 12:6, Paul speaks of a gift given to a member of Christ’s church so that it may be used in the service of Christ and of his kingdom—“*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.*”

Therefore, it is likely that Paul speaks of imparting to the Romans a spiritual gift in this latter sense, as a blessing or benefit bestowed upon the members of the church through the means of Paul’s apostolic office.<sup>19</sup> Such a gift has the express purpose of strengthening the Roman church and confirming their faith in the gospel.<sup>20</sup> So when Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, we should understand him to be speaking of those gracious gifts which have their origin in God the Holy Spirit and which are mediated through Paul’s apostolic office. The purpose of these gifts is to strengthen the church and confirm faith. Anything beyond this is pure speculation.

Since Paul has been so encouraged by the reports he has heard of the great faith of the church in Rome, he hopes to be able to encourage them as well. Calvin reminds us regarding this mutual encouragement, “[Paul] means what he says, too, for there is none so void of gifts in the church of Christ who cannot in some measure contribute to our spiritual progress. Ill will and pride, however, prevent our deriving such a benefit from each other.”<sup>21</sup> Nothing is so delightful as to hear about the wonderful things God is not only doing in our midst, but in the midst of other churches. It is a thrill to hear from Bill Green (our missionary in Costa Rica) about those things that God is doing throughout Central and South America. It is of great encouragement to hear from listeners to the White Horse Inn about people’s journey to Reformation theology. It is a joy to hear what God is doing in the URC church plants throughout Southern California. It is a joy to hear about what God is doing in the lives of church members. So let us make it a habit to mutually encourage each other with glorious reports about God’s blessing in our lives and throughout the churches!

In verses 13-14, Paul informs the brothers in Rome of his great desire to come and meet them. Although, so far he has been prevented from doing so, he knows that a great harvest awaits him when he finally gets there, just as he has witnessed in other cities such as Corinth and Ephesus. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul rejects the racial, social, and class boundaries of Greco-Roman culture, which were much more prominent in Paul’s day than in our own. This is probably why Paul speaks of both Greeks and “Non-Greeks.” The later term is *barbarois* or “barbarians” and refers to those who live beyond the boundaries

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<sup>19</sup> Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.78-79. Cf. Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 60. Hodge, understands this a bit differently. “By spiritual gift is to be understood...a gift derived not only from those miraculous endowments of which such frequent mention is made in the Epistle to the Corinthians, and the ordinary gifts of teaching, exhortation, and prophesying, but also to those graces which are fruits of the Spirit. The extraordinary gifts were communicated by the impositions of the apostles’ hands, Acts 8:17, 19:6; and therefore abounded in churches founded by the apostles, I Cor. 1:7; Gal. 3:5. As the church of Rome was not of this number, it has been supposed that Paul was desirous of conferring to the Roman Christians some of these miraculous powers by which the gospel was in other places attended and confirmed.” See Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 24.

of the Roman empire. Paul, as you may know, is in the habit of using contrasting terms for the sake of emphasis. These two words, Greeks (civilized) and barbarians (uncivilized) are used together, to denote the whole of Gentile humanity.<sup>22</sup> As Jesus Christ has torn down these barriers by reconciling sinners to God, so that sinners can be reconciled to each other, Paul will preach the gospel to everyone without regard to those socio-economic distinctions institutionalized by Greco-Roman culture. These are revolutionary words from Paul, and indicative that the new society God is creating through the preaching of the gospel has no class or ethnic distinctions.

Paul's final word in verse 15, is to express his eagerness to preach the gospel in Rome. It is quite interesting, I think, that Paul is so eager to preach the gospel to a church composed of people who are already converted, and are already known for their great faith! Paul desires to encourage them and build up their faith, and he plans to carry this out, in part, by preaching the gospel to them. While Paul does speak of a harvest, implying his intentions to engage in evangelism while in the city, it is important that we not over look the emphasis upon preaching the gospel in the church to the church. Too often, we associate the gospel as a message for evangelizing non-Christians. Lest we forget, Christians need to hear the gospel on a regular basis as well. It is through the gospel that God calls his own to faith and he strengthens and sustains the faith of those who are already united to Jesus Christ. It is the preaching of the gospel, not the preaching of the law, which creates the desire to obey God's commandments.<sup>23</sup>

For Paul, the preaching of the gospel is everything. He is eager to come to Rome so that he might preach Jesus Christ in the heart of the Roman Empire. He knows that there will be a great harvest and that the church will be strengthened and encouraged because of his visit. So let us follow Paul's example and keep the gospel at the center of everything we do. The message of Christ crucified will confirm our faith and strengthen us as a church, and we will be constantly and mutually encouraged by those things God will do in our midst. For if we are eager for the cross, we will see sinners come to faith, the broken-hearted will be given solace, the downcast will be given hope, and the proud and self-righteous will be humbled. And our testimony of what God is doing in our midst through the preaching of the gospel will be of great encouragement to all the churches. Yes, the gospel is everything. May we be as eager for that gospel as Paul . . .

Let us pray . . .

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<sup>22</sup> Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.83.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q 65.