

## **“EAGER TO PREACH THE GOSPEL IN ROME.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Romans 1:8-15**

### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from your mouth. Make us hungry for this heavenly food, that it may nourish us today in the ways of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.

### **Introduction.**

We are working our way through Paul’s introduction to his letter. We will be another week on this passage which will lead us to verses 16-17 which are the grand theme or heart of the letter.

After an opening greeting almost all of Paul’s letter open with a personal expression of love, gratitude and prayer.

Whatever you might think about this great towering figure of an apostle, don’t leave out he was a shepherd with a heart of tender affection for God and tender compassion for the sheep. He was no hireling, he was a true shepherd willing to lay down his life for the sheep and he did. He suffered for those he didn’t know and in a way that includes us.

We have before us a personal glimpse into the spiritual life of the apostle Paul, and his prayer life, how he prays and what he prays for.

### **First.**

He begins with the word first, but when we go looking for second, there is none. First doesn’t mean first, then second, then third. First means the most important thing, the supreme thing.

Prayer is of first and foremost importance to Paul. Most of his letters open this way and several include specific prayers, like the one in Colossians 1 that I am encouraging us to pray for ourselves and each other this year.

**I Corinthians 1:4** I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.

**Philippians 1:3-5** I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel.

**Colossians 1:3-4** We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.

**I Thessalonians 1:2-3** We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love.

Notice to whom Paul prays and how.

### **My God.**

He doesn't say God, but my God. I am reminded of when Thomas saw Jesus in person, he cried out, "My Lord and my God." This is no distant God, this is a tender statement of how personal and real God is. To be able to say "my God" is a special privilege God gives to His covenant children by grace through faith.

To His covenant children God says, "You will be my people and I will be your God."

What is Paul saying when he declares God to be his God? He is testifying to having the spirit of adoption, he is a child of the Father, by faith in Jesus. What a glorious grace it is to be able to say, "God is my Father and I am His son."

Do you know what an incomparable privilege it is to call the holy God of the universe, my God?

**Psalms 18:1** I love you, O Lord, my strength. 2 The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Don't ever be ashamed to say God is my God, God is personal and real to me, Jesus is not just Lord and Savior, but my Lord and Savior. Paul was a man's man and he testified openly.

### **Through Jesus Christ.**

Why does Paul say through Jesus Christ? Why not straight to God? Because God is holy and you are not. You can't come into the presence of God without Jesus Christ. If you come into the presence of God without Jesus you will die. God is a consuming fire.

Remember in the OT Uzzah tried to steady the Ark of the Covenant, when he touched it, he died.

Paul comes to the Father through Jesus Christ, who is the righteousness of God, who died to appease the righteous wrath of the Father, and make it possible for us to come into the presence of the holy God. That is why the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died. It was His blood, His death that opened the way.

People who are not Christians will say things like “Oh, God and me are good. God and me have an understanding. We are friends, we are buddies, we are chill.” They don’t know God and they don’t know their sin. They are not good, they are dead men walking.

When they get in God’s courtroom on judgment day they are toast unless they have a really good lawyer, and the only lawyer who can give them any hope, is the mediator and advocate, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is our mediator with the Father. When we pray we should pray in His name. Jesus is the one who brings the prayers and the thanksgivings of Christians to the throne of God.

**John 14:6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

### **Gratitude, I thank my God.**

Notice the content of Paul’s prayer, what he prays for. He starts with gratitude, I thank.

Our culture is so short on gratitude. We are a country of grumblers and complainers. We are quick to point out what is wrong with everything and everybody else. We are not grateful. “I have been hurt, I have been done wrong, I haven’t got what I deserve.”

What is the source of Paul’s gratitude? Why is he so grateful? What causes a person to be a grateful person?

When you see what you have received is a true gift. When you realize you have nothing that is your own doing, it is all grace. When you see to the depths and to the core your sin and sinfulness and how much you have been forgiven and how undeserving you are.

He who is forgiven much loves much, and he who is given much is grateful much. If you honestly know and face your sinfulness and your desperate need for God’s grace, and see how abundant His grace is, then you will live a life of humble gratitude.

If you or someone you know is always grumbling and complaining and pointing out what is wrong with everyone else and the world, that is a person who doesn't know their sin and how big a deal it is.

If you have been humbled by God, if you walk with a limp, be thankful, that is a good gift.

Cultivate a heart of gratitude, see everything you have as a gift.

**Philippians 4:6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Cultivate a heart of gratitude in your children and grandchildren. Teach them to say thank you. Start with small things so that it will grow for larger things. For little blessings and large ones.

Teach them that everything they have comes from God, their parents, their house, their bed and toys, their cousins and friends, their teachers, their minds to learn, their health and strength.

(Melissa Kruger, His Grace is Enough).

Paul is compelled, motivated, driven by gratitude for who God is and what God has done for him, and will do for everyone who hears and believes.

### **Your faith.**

Notice how Paul prays for their faith. Notice he thanks God for it. Why does he do that? Isn't it their faith, isn't it their doing? If David does something for me, I don't send a thank you to Neil. If Valerie does something for me, I don't send a thank you to Mary. So why does he thank God for their faith? Because God is the one who gave it to them.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We can never boast we are a believer in Jesus, we can only say thank you. It is not our doing, it is the gift of God. It is God who gives us the grace to believe, and He gives us the faith which is the instrument of believing. God commands us to have faith and then gives it to us.

What do we have, we have not received? We receive nothing except what is given us from heaven. Every good and perfect gift comes down from heaven.

“I Know Whom I Have Believed.”

“I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart,  
Nor how believing in His Word wrought peace within my heart.  
I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin,  
Revealing Jesus through the Word, creating faith in Him.”

Plead with God to give you faith. And then plead with Him to increase your faith.

### **I serve with my spirit.**

Paul defines his relationship with God as a willing slave of Jesus whom he serves.

Paul is no hireling, just doing a job, he is a servant, a slave serving in the energy and power of the Holy Spirit at work in him. He is not serving himself, but the Gospel of God's Son.

He serves with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Paul is not one of those people who worships God just with his lips, he is not one of those people who just worships outwardly or externally, just by going to church on Sunday, just by doing what others do.

He was not a hypocrite, his outward actions line up with his inner actions, words, thoughts.

We know Paul to be a hard worker, he labored day and night for the Gospel. But Paul was also a hard prayer. He never ceased. This is significant. Paul had never been to Rome, he didn't know them personally, yet he prayed for them unceasingly.

Is there anything you pray frequently and earnestly for? Something constantly on your mind and heart? Do you pray for anything regularly that is beyond your circle, your family and your needs, something for the kingdom? Hausa people of Nigeria.

The unceasing prayers of one couple in West Virginia that started in 1978 would lead fifteen years later to our church in OKC making a deep connection with the church in Albania and to Von and Sue Golder. Those prayers would draw me and Phama into a significant ministry relationship and harvest.

What are you asking God for that is bigger than you? More than you can ask or imagine? This is why our Mission's Celebration is more important than we realize. I want us to have face to face relationships with those God has called us to partner with for the Gospel. I want them to know us and for us to know them. I want us to pray with them for kingdom advancing transformation in our county and world.

## **Unceasing Prayer.**

Paul's prayer is an expression of Paul's love for a people he has never met. Not once but twice he stresses how much he wants to come to them.

Why is Paul not satisfied with just sending a letter? Are lovers satisfied with letters or emails or texts? No. Are we satisfied with virtual relationships?

When the apostle Paul looked for a metaphor or analogy to describe the relationship between Christ and His Church, he used marriage. The love between a husband and a wife is a picture of the love Jesus has for His Bride. Just as we wouldn't want a purely virtual relationship in our marriages, so we shouldn't settle for just a virtual relationship with Christ and His Church.

Paul longed for that community with the church in Rome. We long for the day when we will be with Jesus, our head, in a personal physical relationship.

One of the clearest pictures of this is evident at this table, the family meal for Christians. Jesus invites to come to His table, to have spiritual fellowship with Him and to take and eat real spiritual nourishment embodied in these elements. As much as we hunger for this food, may we hunger for fellowship with each other and never take it for granted.

The Gospel is about restoration of broken fellowship, and reconciliation of broken relationship. The Gospel is about salvation, fellowship and worship. The Gospel is a call to a relationship with Christ and His followers. The Gospel is about the body of Christ as a gathered community of believers partaking in the unity of the Spirit through the means of grace.

This table is what makes it possible to say, "my God through Jesus Christ."

This table is a table of thanksgiving, a table that makes us the most grateful people on earth.

This table is a table that feeds and nourishes our faith as it is received by the gift of faith. This table is the gift of God for the people of God.