



## Paul's Letter to The Romans

### Preaching to the Choir: The Gospel is for Christians Too...Romans 1:8-15

**“Preaching to the choir”**, it’s a wonderfully pregnant expression that evokes all kinds of mental imagery. You almost can’t help but visualize a preacher standing with his back to the congregation, facing the choir with a Bible in one hand and a white handkerchief in the other hammering home truths they already believe. For a long time, whenever I heard the expression **“preaching to the choir”** I invariably thought back to my own fundamentalist background and to some angry, discouraged preacher perversely hoping to motivate the people of God by ripping them to shreds. Of course, that’s my baggage not yours. More than likely when you hear the phrase, you either think of a minister trying to hammer home truths everyone in the congregation already believes or you think of a minister trying desperately to evangelize the unconverted even though there are no unconverted present. Still I have to admit my mental image of someone **“preaching to the choir”** lightened up a few years back when I added a wonderful little book to my library entitled *Yankee Doodle Went to Church*. The book, written by James Adams, is a study on the colonial church in America at the time of the American Revolution. Mostly it’s a serious book but it does contain this one wonderful little story...and you will see I think why once I heard it, I couldn’t put it out of my mind. Adams writes:

The story is told of a New England deacon who, because of failing eyesight, found difficulty in reading the first line of the Psalm *that he was lining out for the choir* and he apologized by observing: **“My eyes, indeed, are very blind.”**

The choir thinking that *was* the first line of a common-meter hymn immediately repeated back to him: **“My eyes, indeed, are very blind;”** whereupon the deacon exclaimed: **“I cannot see at all.”** This *line* the choir also sang.

Astonished, the deacon cried out: **“I really believe you are bewitched”** and the choir responded, **“I really believe you are bewitched,”** whereupon the deacon added, **“The mischief’s in you all,”** and after the choir had sung that *too*, the deacon sat down *overwhelmed with* disgust.<sup>1</sup>

Now I love that. I think I love it especially because most people think of the Puritans as almost inhuman in their solemnity. Clearly they did not always take themselves so seriously or this story would have never been written down. Of course, the real reason I wanted to tell that story is because I like it so much and it because it fits more or less under the general rubric of someone preaching to the choir. You see there is a sense in which the section we are looking at this morning could be described as Paul’s promise to do just that with the Romans. I bring that up is because in Romans 1:8-15, Paul outlines what at first blush seem like two mutually exclusive ideas. In Romans 1:8-10, Paul explains that he has heard of the faith of the Romans and has made their faith an issue of constant thanksgiving and praise. Then, he adds to that that he has prayed for the Romans and the opportunity to see them for a long time. So, basically in verses 8-10 he says that he has heard about their faith and has prayed for a long time for the chance to finally come to Rome and visit them.

Now there’s nothing really all that strange about any of that. It is perfectly understandable that Paul would want to visit the imperial city of Rome and the church that was located there. Rome was certainly the most important city in the

world. In fact, it was the capital of the world. What does seem a little strange is that Paul recognizes the faith of the Romans in verses 8-10 and yet declares that he has a strong desire, really a compulsion, to preach the gospel to them in verses 11-15. That makes me want to ask, **“Didn’t he recognize that they were already Christians?<sup>2</sup> And if they were already Christians, why was it Paul felt such a compelling interest to preach the gospel to them, people who already knew and believed the gospel?”<sup>3</sup>**

Wouldn’t preaching to the Romans be sort of like **“preaching to the choir”** and doesn’t Paul make the point later on that he never really cared to preach the gospel where other evangelists had already been? Isn’t that what he means in Romans 15:20, when he says...?

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 15:20...** and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,

Still, in spite of that, it seems perfectly clear that preaching the gospel to the Romans was exactly what Paul wanted to do. Look down to Romans 1:15.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:15...Romans 1:15** <sup>15</sup> So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Now what I want to suggest to you this morning and this is really quite simple is this, **“I think Paul is admitting here that the gospel is for Christians too.”**

I think that is the reason he’s not only willing to preach the gospel to those in Rome but is actually eager to do so.

Now before we begin to look at the individual verses, I want to take just a minute and remind you of how I understand the overall purpose of the Epistle to the Romans. I think Paul wrote this wonderful letter to...

**...to prepare a church he did not know for an intended visit. He did that by explaining the gospel he preached and he did that in order that they might...**

**...be edified,**

**...be at peace with one another**

**...help him on his way to Spain**

Now having said that let's put in at verse 8.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:8**...First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

The first thing I want you to notice in verse eight is Paul's use of the word "**first**". What is strange about it is that you expect after a word like "**first**" that there will be a word like "**second**" or "**third**". Yet, in Romans Paul never gets to whatever was going to be "**second**" or "**third**".<sup>4</sup> That has led a few translations like the New English Bible to smooth out the construction to..."**let me begin by**" which works pretty well I think.<sup>5</sup>

Now notice exactly how Paul does begin...he begins by thanking God for the Romans. But I want you to notice exactly how he puts it.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:8**... First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you...

It is no accident that Paul put it just that way. You see the phrase that Paul uses "**my God**" is fairly rare in his writings. Oh, he's fairly quick to say, "**God our Father**" but is very slow to say "**my God**."<sup>6</sup> Now I think that is interesting especially here where he connects the phrase "**my God**" to the phrase "**through Jesus Christ**". You see for Paul the idea that we a relationship with the Father at all is completely dependent upon the mediatorial work of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> He stands as a

mediator between us and the Father. I particularly liked the way my old friend Larry Danner said it in our first trip up the lofty slopes of Romans together. He said, **“Jesus stands as the great meeting place between God and man. He represents God to us and He represents us to God. In a very real sense, Jesus is God to man and man to God.”**<sup>8</sup> Don’t you just love that? Here, however, Paul just hints at the theme of **“mediation”** that he will develop at length in the rest of the letter. Of course, that raises the question, **“What was it Paul thanked God for?”** He gives the answer in the rest of verse 8.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:8**...First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

Do you see the answer there? He thanks God through Jesus Christ for the Romans themselves and the reason he thanks God for them is because of their faith. And their faith is not just any kind of faith, it is a faith that is known all over the world and I want to add to that that I think it is a faith in something in particular.

Now let’s think about for a moment together. When he uses the word **“faith”** does he mean **“faithfulness”**? Does he mean **“your faithfulness”** is known all over the world? Certainly that is a grammatical possibility. Or when he uses the word **“faith”** does he mean some deep subjective confidence the Romans possess in their power to **“believe”**... you know, like a whole number of television evangelists’ brag about today? Does he mean the Romans have an ability to procure results by the strength or assertiveness or audacity of their ability to believe is known all over the world? Does he mean that their ability to name and claim whatever they need to advance the kingdom in style is known all over the world? Or does he mean that they have the **“gift of faith”** where they can believe

great things for God, like George Mueller or Hudson Taylor?<sup>9</sup> Or does Paul mean something simple like **“the faith, hope and confidence you have in the Lord Jesus”** is known all over the world?

Brothers and sisters, I think he means the latter. I think he means that the fact that they have put their trust in Christ’s atoning work to cover over their sins is known throughout the world. I think he means that he is grateful that they are Christians. Now there is a reason I think that is what it means. First, he has been talking about the gospel that was promised in the Old Testament (vs. 2). He has been talking about the gospel that is really about the Lord Jesus (vv.3-5). He has been talking about the fact that they have been called to be **“saints”** (vs. 6) and he is about to talk about the gospel of the Lord Jesus that he preaches (vs. 9). All of those things are about something that must be believed. You see their faith is not about their **“subjective power to assert anything”** it is about the fact that they trust in the objective reality of what Christ has done for them.

Whenever, I think of people asserting their faith or acting as if they had some special ability to believe that other people don’t have. I always think of that wonderful little story Dr. Criswell used to tell. It went something like this:

There was a young boy, whose mother was a member of a Christian Scientist group. One day the boy ran into their and shouted out, **“Momma, momma...you know that old woman down the street that has been so sick.”**

The boy’s mother stopped right him in the middle of his thought and said, **“Now what have I told you about that? You know we are Christian Scientists and don’t believe that there is any such thing as age or sickness. That woman you**

**are talking about is not really sick. Her sickness is really all in her mind; she just thinks she's sick. Don't you remember what I have been telling you?"**

**"Yes momma,"** the boy replied.

**"Well then go ahead and finish your story but tell it right,"** the mother patiently added.

**"Yes, momma. Well that old woman down the street that is sick...I mean that woman down the street that thinks she sick. Well now...now, she thinks she's dead."**<sup>10</sup>

You see there are those who assert all kinds of things but they're not the kind of people Paul has in mind. Paul is not thanking God for the depth of the faith of the Romans. The Romans may have been wondrously faithful or they may have just been regular Christians plodding along in their sanctification. No, Paul is thanking God for the fact that even in Rome there are believers.<sup>11</sup> He is so grateful that God has moved upon their hearts and drawn them to Himself. He is not grateful that they possess some sort of super Christian faith but rather that they possess Christian faith at all. That is to be understood, I think, especially in light of the kind of city Rome was. Listen to what Kent Hughes writes:

Rome was *the* city of the world. Her law was the foundation for all that followed, her art was borrowed but appreciated, her military system was the wonder of the world. Yet: How pitiless she was!...Amid all the ruins of her cities we find *no* hospitals, none...*no* orphan schools in an age that made many orphans. The pious aspirations and efforts of individuals never seem to have touched the conscience of the people. Rome had no conscience; she was a lustful, devouring beast, made more bestial by her intelligence and splendor.<sup>12</sup>

You see Paul was grateful that the gospel had gone even there. I wonder does the glory of God's kindness in Christ ever overwhelm you so much that you burst out in praise just for the fact that there are actually believers out there. I know that's happened to me several times. It happened to me once when I was in Africa. I was just absolutely overwhelmed by the fact that there was a church there, preaching the gospel in the midst of so much darkness. I was riding with Keith Kanavel and he pulled up on a little, dirt side street in Niamey. There was a little house there and it had a concrete block wall around it and really was just the tiniest thing, not much bigger than the one I live in. When Keith Kanavel told me that it was church more heart soared like an eagle. You would have thought I was looking at the Westminster Abbey. You see I was just so grateful there was church there.

Another time in seminary, Dr. Ron Blue took us to a Hare Krishna Temple as a part of a mission outreach program. I remember sitting there on the floor of that temple in my sock feet, listening to some idiotic Krishna guru drone on and on about the glories of Krishna when God directed my attention to ten or fifteen precious little children laying there on the bare floor, wearing their Krishna outfits coloring pictures of idols. I thought to myself, **"You know these little kids ought to be in a vacation Bible school somewhere coloring pictures of Noah, Abraham or Moses."**

But there they were laying on the floor of Krishna temple being trained to worship gods that were no gods at all and the whole heart-breaking weight of the moment swept over me and crushed me like a giant tidal wave. I came home and cried every time I thought about it for two days. I know Beverly must have thought it was about time to have me committed. But you know what? When I

drove down the street the next day, I thought to myself, **“Lord thank you for that church right there where the gospel is being preached. Thank you for that one too. Thank you for that Christian school and for that church that is holding a Vacation Bible School where some precious saint is taking the time to go tell some little kid about Jesus. In fact, Lord thank you for all Christian churches, and all Christian leaders and all Christian men and women, boys and girls everywhere.”**

You see that is what Paul is saying here. He is grateful that there are Christians in Rome and he is grateful that the whole world knows they are there. Of course, his gratitude works itself out in his desire to pray for them constantly. Look at how he says that in verse 9-11.

**ESV Romans 1:9**...For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you <sup>10</sup> always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

Now this is one of those sentences than in the Bible where understanding a bit of Greek really does help. You see word order doesn't generally mean very much in Greek. It doesn't matter if you put a verb first or a noun first in Greek. The case endings and the verbs endings tell you what's what. You can see if a word ought to be subject or a direct object just by observing the ending on the word. There is one aspect however of word order that does matter. The further forward you move something in a Greek sentence, the more emphasis it carries. You can still see remnants of that in English if you think about it. Take for example these three sentences.

**“Bitten was I by a dog.”** The emphasis is clearly on the word **“bitten”**. The dog didn't lick me it bit me.

**“A dog it was that bit me.”** The emphasis is that it was **“dog”** that did the evil deed. It wasn't a gecko or a Junebug that bit me it was a dog.

And then finally, **“Me, it was me that bitten by a dog.”** It was me and not someone else that was bitten.

Do you see what I mean? The further forward something is moved the more important it is. Now verse 9, really stresses the point that God is Paul's witness so to just how often Paul prays for the Romans. Paul pushed the word **“witness”** all way forward in the sentence to make a big deal of the fact. That means, I think, that the idea ought to be translated a little more firmly than it is in either the NAS or the NIV. I think Paul is saying something like this, **“Look here, God, God Himself, is my witness, the one whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His son, just how often I make mention of you in my prayers...”**

You Paul is trying to make it crystal clear to the Romans that he really did think about them and pray for them often.<sup>13</sup> I am taking **“in my spirit”** as it is used in the NAS to mean something very much like the NIV puts it, **“wholeheartedly”**.<sup>14</sup>

But even if you take it differently there are four words strung together in Greek in verse 10 that make it clear Paul longs to see them.

BNT **Romans 1:10...** πάντοτε ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου δεόμενος εἶ (if somehow) πως (in some way) ἤδη (now at last) ποτέ (after so long) εὐδοωθήσομαι ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. You see these four words εἶ (if somehow), πως (in some way), ἤδη (now at last) ποτέ (after so long), really stress Paul's anxious longing to visit the Romans.

It is so repetitive, so intense it almost sounds like little kids on the way to day at the beach, **“Are we there yet? What about now? Now? When?”** Still in verse 11, Paul explains why he wants to see them.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:11**...For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-- <sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

You see Paul wants to come to them, to build them up, to edify them, to make them strong, to exercise their minds and their spirits in the gymnasium of the gospel of God. You see Paul is saying that he wants to preach to the choir because there is great benefit in going over the gospel again.

I remember a few years back I preached a sermon at Ft. Worth Presbyterian and used as an illustration a story about someone that came up to me after one of the Sunday school lessons I had taught with Larry. This beloved brother came up to me and said, **"You know Tom I just need to hear the gospel over and over again. Thank you for pointing out that Christ washed away all my sin, even mine. Tell me again and again. I just need to hear it one more time."** Anyway, I told that story and after the service the little old lady came up to me there with tears in her eyes, just weeping and said almost the exact thing. She said, **"Oh, I need to hear again too. I needed to hear it one more time."** You see that is what Paul is saying to the Romans.

He is saying I want to build you up and I want to do that by preaching the gospel to you. Of course, Paul knows that is not a one-way street. **"You can build me up too,"** he tells them. Now there are some commentators that think that Paul is just being polite here, they seem to think that Paul never needed to be encouraged by others.<sup>15</sup> But I think that is nonsense. You see there is something wonderfully affirming in having other Christians remind you of the gospel. I used to work in an office where we had the habit of reminding each other of the forgiveness we have in Christ. Sometimes we do that by **"absolving"** each other

of our sins. I might go into one of the brother's offices and just say, "**Brother, I know you are worried about his or that and I want you to know that I absolve you of your sin and failure.**" Now don't get the wrong idea, we all know that we can forgive nothing but we also know that we can speak the truth about the reality of Christ's work on the cross.

One of the things I like to do most when I worked with Tom Ferrell over in Arlington was to go into his office and say, "**You know Tom...your sin, oh the bliss of the glorious thought, your sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and you bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord oh my soul.**"<sup>16</sup>

Now he knew full well that that is from "**It is Well With My Soul.**" You know I suspect he knew the lyrics to that song better than I did. But not one time in three years did he ever say, "**You know I know that and right now I am a little too busy for that.**" No, instead he just smiled and shook his head as only Ferrell could do and said, "**Amen brother, thank you.**" Then invariably he would come by my office later on and just peek in the door and quote something like this from Pilgrim's Progress: "So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulcher, where it fell in, and I saw it no more."<sup>17</sup>

Now you know what, I never did get tired of that and if I ever do get tired of it please just take me out and bury me because I am sure I will have long since died and gone to heaven. No, I have to hear that over and over and I think that is what keeps me going and I know that is what Paul is saying here. He is saying, "**God is my witness how I long to see you. I want to visit you and now perhaps**

**at long last I will be able to and we can build each other up in the gospel.”<sup>18</sup>**

Of course, that raises the question, **“Paul if you are so all-fired anxious for us to be built up by the gospel, why haven’t you come before now?”** Paul tries to answer that question in verse 13 but it is not altogether clear to what he is attributing the delay in coming to Rome.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:13**...I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest<sup>19</sup> among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

It may be that Paul is hinting that he has been delayed by satanic opposition. I think that is probably the most unlikely explanation even though he does refer to that elsewhere.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Thessalonians 2:17**...But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, <sup>18</sup> because we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, again and again--but Satan hindered us.

It may be that he is saying in a sort of round about Hebrew way that God Himself had prevented him from coming to them. Something like Luke says in Acts 16:7.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 16:7**...And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Or it may be what Paul will allude to later on in Romans 15:20 when he says...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 15:20**...and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,

<sup>21</sup> but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." <sup>22</sup> This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. <sup>23</sup> But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, <sup>24</sup> I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

If this idea is what Paul is alluding to, then basically he is saying, **"Since I had to preach where other men had not, I had to finish my task here and now that is done. I have no place left to preach here.<sup>20</sup> So I am going to Spain and I will finally get to see you on the way."**

Still, the point is that Paul always wanted to go to Rome and in case there is any doubt left in their mind that he wants to preach to the saints in Rome look at what he says in Romans 1:14.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:14**...I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

Do you get the thing that drives him? The ESV says it's Paul's **"obligation"**. I really dislike that because it takes a wonderful word like **"debtor"** (the same word used in the Lord's Prayer) and obscures it with a fairly nebulous word like **"obligated"**. What he actually says is much closer to the NKJ.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Romans 1:14**...I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.

Now let me ask you, "How was Paul their debtor? Had he ever been to Rome? Had he ever borrowed anything from any of them? Had they somehow obtained one of his banknotes or credit card balances?"

The answer to everyone of those questions is a resounding, **“No!”**

That’s not the kind of debt he owed. Instead he owed the debt of an ambassador.

I love the way Donald Grey Barnhouse puts it...

Paul was debtor to all in a very special sense, it is true that every Christian is to be a witness, but Paul had a special debt that was above and beyond our debt, for he was the man to whom God made the special revelation that was to be passed on to us...“When Moses had received the tables written with the finger of God, and the pattern of the tabernacle for Israel, he was bound, he was a debtor, both to God and to Israel, to deliver those tables and that pattern, as given to him by God. To Paul, the risen, glorified Christ Himself had given the gospel by a special revelation (Gal. 1:11, 12); and Paul, as we know, was especially to go to the Gentiles. Just as definitely as Moses received the law for Israel, so Paul received the gospel for us, and he was a debtor, both to God and to us, till he had the gospel committed to all.”<sup>21</sup>

Do you see that? He is saying Paul received a charge. Like an ambassador sent by the President of the United States with a secret, highly important message, Paul had no intention of being moved to the left or the right. He had a task to perform; he had a mission to accomplish; he had a debt to pay. You remember how he described his calling earlier in verse 5...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:5**...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

You see Paul understood his salvation in a personal sense. He owed a debt of gratitude to the Lord Jesus to live in such a way as to show his gratitude and indebtedness for what Christ has done. We all have that. But his understanding of his calling went way beyond that. He viewed himself as a personal envoy of

Lord Jesus Christ and he was willing to bear whatever came his way to carry out that message. Listen to his description of what he endured for Christ.

<sup>NIV</sup> **2 Corinthians 11:23**...I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. <sup>28</sup> Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

You see Paul was a driven man and yet he was totally unafraid. He wasn't driven along by some sort of perverse, works-righteousness. No, he was driven along by love and conscience and gratitude and a sense of calling and purpose. That is what he says pushes him along in...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 1:15**...So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

And that is why next week we will hear him explain why he is so eager when he will say, **"You know I am not ashamed of the gospel."** In fact, there are three sentences in a row here that are just so wonderful. Paul says, **"I am eager. I am obligated. I am unashamed."**

Paul is the first to admit that he wants to preach to everyone everywhere, to the wise to the unwise, to the Greeks to the Barbarians to anyone and everyone that will listen. That is why this week as you meditate on these few verses I pray you

will come to hear Paul whispering, **“Look I know you are part of the choir but boy do I have a few words for you. You see brother...you see sister, the gospel is for Christians too.”**

Whenever I think of that relentless, driven passion I think of a wonderful story about Dr. R.G. Lee. When R.G. Lee was an old man and retired from his pulpit at Bellview Baptist church in Memphis, he had many occasions to preach. In particular, he was often asked to preach his most famous sermon, “Payday Someday”. He had preached it already over a thousand times when he was asked to preach it again at Lavon Drive Baptist church in Garland. But the night before he was to speak, Dr. Lee already in his eighties, was mugged and savagely beaten outside his motel room in Garland. Vile, spiteful hoodlums had pummeled the frail old saint's face. They had broken one of his arms. Dr. Lee should have stayed in the hospital but the night he was to speak he showed up bruised and bandaged. Dr. Lee began his sermon, which was a recounting of the struggle between Elijah, the man of God, and the infamous duo, Ahab and Jezebel. Dr. Lee was so eloquent and though he was in pain he managed the complex masterpiece, which he had already preached so many times. About halfway through his sermon, standing at the edge of an elevated platform, Dr. Lee began to sway back and forth. He turned pale and as he passed out the old saint fell down the seven or eight steps of the platform landing unconscious and bloodied at the base of the platform.

Men from the church rushed to his care and swathed his face with cool damp clothes. Finally, he came to. **“Dr. Lee lie still. We are calling an ambulance. It will take you to the hospital,”** the men begged. But the frail old man would have

none of that. He winced as he slowly began to get up. **"My brothers, get me up...get me up" he said as they helped him up. "If you do not mind I believe, I believe I will have one more shot at that old heifer, Jezebel."**

You see he was eager. He was obligated. He was unashamed. He was ready to preach even to the choir for he knew that the gospel was for Christians too.

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<sup>1</sup> James L. Adams, *Yankee Doodle Went to Church: The Righteous Revolution of 1776* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1989), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Archibald Thomas Robertson, "The Epistle to the Romans" in *Word Pictures In the New Testament Volume 6: Epistles of Paul* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 325. Robertson quotes Sanday and Headlam and equates "your faith" to "your Christianity".

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988; reprint, 1994), 65. Morris writes the following "The question arises, of course, "Why preach the gospel to Christians?" Our answer should probably be that in this sense he writes to his as Romans rather than as Christians (so Godet). In Rome as elsewhere it is to nonbelievers that he would bring the gospel." I am not sure that he is right. I think Paul is making a point of preaching the gospel to those he understands to be believers.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans from the Crossway Classic Series* edited by Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1993), 23. Hodge notes that Paul does the exact same thing in 1 Corinthians 11:18.

<sup>5</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38a: Romans 1-8*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1998), 27.

<sup>6</sup> He does this some ten times. Cf Rom 1:7, 1Co 1:3, 2Co 1:2, Gal 1:3, Eph 1:2, Phi 1:2, Col 1:2, 2Th1:1, 2Th 2:16, and Phm 1:3. He refers to the "Father of our lord Jesus Christ" some four times. Cf. Rom 15:6, 2Co 1:3, Eph 1:3, and Col 1:3. Paul only uses "my God" five times and three of the instances are related to his prayer life. Cf. Rom 1:8, 2Co 12:21, Phi 1:3, Phi 4:19, and Phm 1:4.

<sup>7</sup> Hodge, 23. Hodge writes: "This expression implies the mediation of Christ, through whom alone we have access to the Father, and for whose sake alone both our prayers and our praises are accepted. See 7:25. Also, Ephesians 5:20, "Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"; Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"; and Hebrews 13:15, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise" All this is in accordance with Christ's command in John 14:13; compare John 16:24: "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive."...Such, then, is the clear teaching of the Bible. In all our approaches to God in prayer or praise, we must come in the name of Christ . that is, in him, referring to him as the ground of our acceptance.

<sup>8</sup> Larry W. Danner, "Exposition of Romans 1:8-15" in *Browning and Danner's Expository Series on Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Arlington, Texas: Arlington Presbyterian Church, 1996), 3/10/96.

<sup>9</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 1, The Gospel of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 176-7. He writes: "But you notice that in an especial manner he thanks God for their faith. 'First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world'. What does he mean by that? **I do not hold the view that he means that they had some very unusual or special faith.** There is such a thing as that, isn't there? You remember that in First Corinthians chapter twelve, in the list of spiritual gifts that is given there, among them is mentioned this special gift of faith. Now that does not mean saving faith, because all Christians have saving faith. But all Christians do not have that special, peculiar gift which is referred to there. That is the sort of faith which men like Hudson Taylor and George Muller had, and others. They were given a special gift of faith to manifest the glory of God.

Now I do not think the Apostle is referring to that here. What he is referring to is the fact that they have faith in a saving sense. It is just another way of saying that he thanks God that they are Christians. He is not saying that they are unusual or outstanding in their faith and in their manifestation of faith. No! He is thanking God that they have faith at all. And again observe that he thanks God for that. The Apostle has some very interesting things to say about faith. We shall, God willing, arrive at that passage in the twelfth chapter where he says, '...according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith . . . So we, being many, are one in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us...let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith'. But we do not stay with that now; let us just observe these things in passing. I am suggesting that the Apostle here is really thanking God for the fact that these people are Christians, and that they are exercising their faith in God through the Lord Jesus Christ."

<sup>10</sup> Dr. W.A. Criswell, (Dallas: First Baptist Church). I'm sorry I can't cite this correctly. I listened to Dr. Criswell preach every Sunday night on the radio for about ten years and I have no way to know exactly when this story (obviously meant as a joke) first came to my attention.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwin C. Hoskyns, from the 6th ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 32. Against Barth is Barrett who argues for the "faith" of the Romans as they hold it. Cf. C.K. Barrett, *Romans: The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 24. But if Paul was arguing for the superiority of the Roman faith why did he spend so much time trying to enlighten them with such an extraordinary letter. It seems more likely that he is just grateful for the fact that their faith is known.

<sup>12</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1991), 25. Hughes is quoting John Phillips, *Exploring Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 19, who quotes Sir H. Rider Haggard, *Pearl Maiden* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1901), p. 15. That makes me the fourth quoter.

<sup>13</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Before the Face of God: A Daily Guide for Living from the Book of Romans Book 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 18. I love what Sproul writes: "In the same way Paul prayed for Christians on the firing line in Rome. Reports of Paul's great work had surely filtered back to the

imperial city. These people, who would later become human torches in the Caesars' gardens, food for the lions and sport for the gladiators, were already suffering hostility. I'm sure some of them were feeling that the great apostle simply didn't care. Was he afraid of what he might suffer if he came to Rome? Paul puts himself in their shoes and assures them of his love— and his prayers."

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 54. "He then glories that he served God with sincere devotion of heart, which is true religion and approved worship... It is then the same thing, as though Paul had said, that he knew how much sacredness and sincerity belonged to an oath, and that he did not rashly appeal to God as a witness, as the profane are wont to do."

<sup>15</sup> Morris, 61. Morris cite Kasemann. See footnote 131. "Kasemann, who sees "uncertainty and embarrassment" here, discerns a "sudden change from the stylized certainty of the prescript and the dignity of the thanksgiving"; The planned visit is...definitely divested of any official character, in obvious contradiction of the real plans of the apostle and of the claims raised in v. 5" (p. 19). He rejects explanations like Paul's modesty, humility, tact and sensitivity, or caution induced by opposition. Instead he finds this to be Paul's reaction to widespread rejection of his apostolic claim. But this reads a good deal into the passage and is a far from obvious explanation of the words. Certainly some of the explanations Kasemann rejects are more convincing than the one he accepts. What *evidence* is there that Paul's claims were rejected at Rome?"

<sup>16</sup> H.G. Spafford, "It is Well with My Soul" taken from *Great Hymns of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Singspiration Music: A Division of Zondervan Publishing, 1968), 256. Adapted somewhat freely.

<sup>17</sup> John Bunyan, "Pilgrim's Progress" taken from *The Complete Works of John Bunyan* (Philadelphia: Bradley, Garretson & Co, 1873), 104.

<sup>18</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News For the World*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 57. "He knows about the reciprocal blessings of Christian fellowship and, although he is an apostle, he is not too proud to acknowledge his need of it."

<sup>19</sup> James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans" in *The Expositor's Greek New Testament* ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 588. Denney says fruit might be either new converts or the furtherance of Christians in their new life.

<sup>20</sup> NIV **Romans 15:19**...by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans Volume 1: Man's Ruin 1:1-32 and God's Wrath 2:1-3:20* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1952 and 1953; reprint 1994), 152-153.