



Gospel Fruitfulness

Romans 1:8-13



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Main point: The Gospel shaped Paul's mind, service, prayers, attitude, efforts, and passion for fruitful ministry.

Introduction:

Derek W.H. Thomas once said that "no epistle shapes the contours of the Gospel with greater clarity than Romans."

Verses 1-17 constitutes the *prologue* of the book of Romans. You can think of it as the *front porch* of a house that is designed to introduce or lead us into the rest of the book. In a sense, if you understand these opening "front porch" verses, you will be able to get your arms around the entire book. Good introductions in a book should always help us to understand *the author's purpose, the intended audience, their reasons for writing, and what they are seeking to accomplish.*

What these first 17 verses are all about is found at the end of verse 1, namely, "...*the gospel of God.*" Romans is Paul's magnum opus, and the first verse is his business card. If you want to know what **the Gospel** is all about in its fullest theological treatment, this is what the book of Romans is.

When Paul speaks about "**the gospel of God,**" that tiny preposition carries great freight. He is not saying that it is *about* God or *concerning* God. Paul is revealing to us that the Gospel has come *from* God—it *started* with God, God created it, and it *belongs to* God. It is *God's Gospel*. Now what that means is that the Gospel is God's solution for your life and mine. The Gospel is God's solution for the human dilemma.

Sin has separated man from God and has caused all the maladies or the ills that we face. And God's solution to those spiritual ills is the Gospel!

Now, what do we need to understand about the Gospel up front?

- First, **it is not a new message**—the Old Testament Scriptures affirm it. (v.2)
- Second, **the substance of the Gospel** concerns *Jesus Christ*. (vv.3-4)
- Third, **the purpose of the Gospel** is to bring about the *obedience of faith*. (v.5a)
- Fourth, **the scope of the Gospel** is all the nations. It's *for the whole world*. (v.5b)
- Fifth, **the goal of the Gospel** is for *the glory of Christ's name*. (v.5c)

The Gospel is not primarily about God saving us. Ultimately, it is about Jesus Christ having more voices in the "Hallelujah Chorus" to sing His praises, according to Dr. Lawson.

Now, where do these voices come from? Verse 6 tells us that these voices will come out of humanity and they are among "*the called of Jesus Christ*." Jesus said, "*Many are called, but few are chosen*" (Matt.22:14). What Jesus means is that many will hear the outward, general call of the Gospel in their hearing, but for the chosen, there is another call that comes. It is an *inward, efficacious* call. It is a *sovereign* call. It is a *divine subpoena* if you will, that draws the elect, imparting life, and bringing them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And right at the opening of this letter, Paul is telling us that God guarantees the reception and success of His message. That is the summation of verses 1-7.

Verses 14-17 contain the "thunder and lightning" of the book of Romans. When George Whitefield was asked if someone could write down his sermons to distribute them as Spurgeon would later do in his ministry, Whitefield said, "Go ahead if you can catch the 'thunder and the lightning' in them." There was a power and saving effect in his preaching that could not be captured on the printed page! However, verses 16 and 17 contain the soul saving, sin exposing, Christ-exalting Gospel of God. We are not going to get to the "thunder and lightning" of verses 14-17, but what we find in verses 8-13 works like a "bridge" to get us there. Bridges are important, and these verses transition us.

If verses 1-7 give us *the message of the Gospel*, then verses 8-13 tell us something about *the messenger of the Gospel*. They are easy to overlook because of the neighborhood they live in, but they allow us to see into the heart and soul of "the" Apostle of the New Testament. The curtain is lifted on his life. The spotlight comes down, and we are shown something about this man's soul, of whom it is argued, "was the greatest Christian who ever lived." Author of 13 of the 27 New Testament books, few can argue against the fact that the Apostle Paul was the most dynamic, most gifted, most sacrificial, and the most diligent Christian servant who ever lived.

What is it about this man that we need to see and emulate? What was it that *drove* this man, and how do we get that *drive* or that *gear shift* in us? What *enlarged* his heart and how can we have this same swelling of our hearts?

Exposition:

In this closing study, I want us to briefly examine, six character qualities that explain Paul's fruitfulness.

1. Spiritually-minded (v.8)

Paul was spiritually minded.

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

How do you know if *a group of people* or a *Christian* are spiritually minded? Is it the music they listen to? The clothes they wear? Is it the tone in which they speak? No. It is seen in *what they thank God for*. Notice what the Apostle Paul *thanks God for*. The answer springs to life if you ask a couple of observation questions.

Where were these Christians located? Rome. Do you think that it was easy or difficult to live as a Christian in Rome? What is Paul thankful for? He is thankful because their faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ was being proclaimed even in the difficult mission field of Rome.

But notice, Paul doesn't thank them for their faithfulness, he thanks God for them. "*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all.*" Why does Paul say it like this? It is because he is spiritually minded and he knows that *what is coming from their lives is not their doing*, but God's work in and through them in Christ. (Cf. *Rom.11:36; Phil.2:13*)

You see a spiritually minded person knows that "every virtue we possess, and every victory won, and every thought of holiness are His alone."¹ If you used this criterion alone, what would it say about the level of your spiritual mindedness?

2. Servant-oriented (v.9a)

Paul was servant oriented.

⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the gospel* of His Son

Notice carefully, what Paul saw as his purpose in life. "*For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son...*" Paul knew that when God saved him, He saved him to serve. And that is true of every Christian. We are saved to serve (*1 Pet.4:10-11; John 12:26; Matt.20:28*).

The word "serve" (*latreuo*) here is used in other places as *worship* (*Rom.12:1-2*). In other words, our service is a form of worship. Someone has said that we are either a *swamp*, a *desert*, or a *river*.

A swamp takes water in and gives nothing out. It is self-contained. It has no outlet. And that's how some Christians are. They give nothing to others. They come, and they receive, but they never give out to others. Remember, bad things grow in swamps.

Some are like a desert. Nothing is going in, and nothing is coming out. It is just a dry, dead, lifeless, hot place. Some people are like deserts, they produce *nothing good* and dry out all who dwell within their presence.

¹ Harriet Auber, *Our Blest Redeemer ere He Breathed*

And then some people are like rivers. There is *movement. Progress. Action. Force. Life. Usefulness*. One of the greatest misnomers about the Christian life is that *service burns you out*. Service does not burn you out; service lights you up! Stagnancy comes when service is deficient (*1 Cor.15:10; Eph.2:10*). Paul had to remind Timothy, as a preventative measure, not a corrective action to "*kindle afresh the gift of God...*" (*2 Tim.1:6-7*). Paul knew that fire tends to burn out, but spiritual fire is kept hot by use. So it is with serving Christ.

How are you serving Christ today, or from week-to-week? Are you doing anything for the Lord? Why was Paul such a fruitful servant of Christ? He was spiritually minded. He was servant-oriented.

3. **Selflessly prayerful** (*vv.9b-10a*)

Paul was always praying for others.

is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making a request,

D.L. Moody once said, "I talk to God about men, before I talk to men about God." Paul is not just talking *about them to others*; he is *talking to God about them*. What percentage of your prayer life is about others? 10%? 20%? 50%? God knows because He hears. Paul said, "God was his witness" as to how much he prayed for others. Prayer is a deeply personal thing, and it is effortless to be all-absorbed in our own needs and desires. Like a squirrel gathering nuts for winter, we must have a room of spiritual provision gathered in intimacy with God. But prayer is not just for us; it is for others also.

One of the greatest encouragements that came to me during a time of fiery trial was from a member's wife who said to me, "Pastor, don't give up. Stay faithful. I know that people are praying for you. I have overheard my husband early in the morning taking you by name before the Lord and interceding for you." Oh, you don't know what that did for me! (*2 Cor.1:9-11*). It was like someone tossing me sword in the battle.

Listen, dear friends, it's okay to pray about your own daily needs as Jesus instructed us (*Matt.6:11*), but how much time do you spend praying for others? Are our lives marked by selfless prayer? Yes, we ought to pray for the lost, yes, we ought to pray for our needs, yes, we ought to pray for those in authority and our nation, but we should also be much in prayer for the needs of the saints (*Eph.6:18*). Paul was much in prayer for the lost, but he "*unceasingly*" prayed for those to whom he was ministering as well. How about you? Do you pray for your leaders, your deacons, your fellow church members here at CASM? This selfless prayer was one of the keys of Paul's fruitfulness. Here is a fourth.

4. **Submissive to God's sovereignty** (*v.10b*)

Paul submitted to God's will in his life.

if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

Paul understood Psalm 103:19, "*The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.*" He believed Psalm 138:8, "*The Lord will accomplish what concerns me...*" He knew that God would not leave His work unfinished. However, he also recognized that God overrules and sovereignly opens a door and closes another. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18, he said to the Thessalonians, "*For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.*" There are times when we desire to do God's will in ministry, and we even pray about it, but the way God works it out is different than what we planned. We may end up getting to the same place, but we had our way, and God had His. And His way

is always right! Paul learned to rely upon God's infinite knowledge as He planned, deferred, and submitted to God's sovereign will in his life.

What are you facing today under the providence of God? Are you grumbling under a "frowning providence"² as Cowper called it? Remember, behind the providences of God, if we are in Christ, He hides a smiling face of favor because we belong to Him as His children.

Here are the marks, the traits, the character qualities that described this man's life. *Spiritually minded. Servant oriented. Selflessly prayerful. Submissive to God's sovereignty.* Two more.

5. Stewardship conscious (vv.11-12)

¹¹For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

Now the "spiritual gift" that Paul speaks of here is not the *gifts* of 1 Corinthians 12, but rather a *spiritual blessing, a spiritual good, or a spiritual impact*. He wanted to use what God had given to him so that they would be "established." *Sterizo* is the Greek term; it means *to cause someone to become stronger* in the sense of becoming firmer and more unchanging in their attitude and belief of Christ. This same term is used when Jesus admonished Peter about how Satan would use his self-confidence to drive him to spiritual defeat. Jesus said, "Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat" (Luke 22:31). Satan not only demanded it, but he obtained permission by asking God. And God gave it to him—why? Because Peter was too self-confident. He had not come to recognize that apart from Jesus he could do nothing (John 15:5b). But Jesus consoled him by saying, "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen (*sterizo*) your brothers" (Luke 22:32).

God is not exposing us to all this sound doctrine to us that we might hoard it for ourselves! He did not give us *the gifts and the opportunities* that we have to squander or waste them on misuse. The Lord wants us to *expend ourselves* for His sake on others. He wants us to let the word "establish" us and then we are to spend our time and energy consciously seeking to establish others.

Paul was conscious of this stewardship (1 Cor.4:2; Eph.3:1-13). However, notice that although he was conscious of *their need of him*, he was also mindful of *his need of them*. "...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."

Connected to much of our progress or lack thereof is how we see "body life." Paul understood that the power of spiritual growth in the context of the church came from "the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph.4:16).

Two mindsets hinder progress in spiritual fruitfulness. One is the elitist mindset that says, "I don't need them." The other is the individualist mindset that says, "They don't need me." Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:15-18,

- ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not, for this reason, any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the

² William Cowper, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*

whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

Do you tend to possess an elitist mentality or an individualist mindset? Paul's understanding of stewardship stretched beyond just saying, "*I must be a good manager of what God has given to me.*" He also understood that "He needed them, and they needed him in the family of God. The same is true of us. We need each other, and Jesus most of all! He invites them into his heart with the expectation of mutual encouragement in the conscious stewardship of the Gospel ministry.

Spiritually minded. Servant-oriented. Selflessly prayerful. Submissive to God's sovereignty. Stewardship conscious. Finally...

6. Sensitive to souls (v.13)

Paul was a sensitive soul-winner.

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.

Notice carefully, Paul's high sensitivity to these believers whom he has yet to meet. The letter of Romans is all correspondence. Paul has not yet arrived in Rome. They were expecting him to come, and he explains, "I've been trying to get there, but God's providence has prevented me so far. You need to know that it's in my heart." That's sensitivity. Someone once told me, "you always need to reach out and communicate with people when there is a chance that your motives might be misunderstood." Expressing this sensitivity and love is what Paul is doing with the Romans. He was thinking about *how they perceived him*, and this was a great example of his love for them.

The words "*so that*" in verse 13 is the purpose clause that explains what he desired in all efforts. Paul was not looking to gain some *status* or *position* or *financial advantage* from them, although he does reveal that he needed help on his missionary journey to Spain (*Rom.15:20-25*). Rather, Paul reveals that his primary purpose in coming to them was that he might obtain some "fruit." What does he mean by "*fruit*" here?

A brief word study of the uses of "*fruit*" in the New Testament reveals some ways this word is interpreted.

- **Romans 15:26**—speaks of the monetary contribution for the poor in Jerusalem as fruit.
- **Ephesians 5:9**—speaks of the fruit or the evidence of light (or holiness) which "*consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.*"
- **Galatians 5:22**—speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, which is nothing less than a profile of Jesus Himself.
- **Hebrews 13:15**—speaks of the fruit of lips that give praise to His name, which is worship.
- **Matthew 7:16**—speaks of fruit as the evidence of one's real character. Whether one is a true believer or a false one, "*You will know them by their fruit.*"
- **John 15:16**—speaks of a fruit of the ministry. "*You did not choose Me but I choose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain...*" (Cf. *John 4:36*)

I believe the way Paul is using the term “fruit” here is that he is looking to see *souls saved “among”* (key preposition) the harvest field of those in Rome, that is, from their midst or environment. Paul not only wanted to see the believers in Rome conformed more and more into the image of Christ, but he also wanted to share in Gospel ministry. Paul was about the business of Christ. He wanted to make disciples. Gospel ministry is all about souls! He was not content to only get heaven himself; he wanted to take a multitude with him. Paul was the strongest believer in the sovereignty of God in evangelism. Just read Romans 9. However, he also wept for his countrymen and believed wholehearted that God calls us to evangelize and call men to repent, believe, enter, come, and follow Christ. Paul was following his Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the greatest evangelist and the most passionate soul-winner ever. Are you endeavoring to win souls? Someone has said that if you are not a fisher of men, you’re not a follower of Christ—for Jesus said, “*Follow Me, and I will make you a fisher of men*” (Mark 1:17).

If we are to follow in Paul’s steps and even in the more significant steps of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom Paul followed (1 Cor.11:1), then we will preach the whole Bible to the entire person. And if we endeavor to be fruitful as our Lord appointed us to be, then we will seek to emulate Paul who was...

- Spiritually minded
- Servant oriented
- Selflessly prayerful
- Submissive to God’s sovereignty
- Stewardship conscious
- Sensitive to souls

Conclusion:

Philip Danforth Armour was the owner of Armour Meat Company in Chicago. He was a business titan in his day. During his time, he was among the top businessman of his generation.

One day he was on a flight coming home from a business trip and a 25-year-old young man—who had just finished college and hadn’t even landed his first job—sat next to him on the plane. Not knowing who Mr. Armour was, the young man said to the business titan, “So, what do you do for a living?”

And without hesitation, Mr. Armour said, “My job is to tell people about Jesus Christ, and I just sell a little meat on the side.”

Being a soul-winner is what our job is. It is our privilege! We are to tell people about Jesus and be a homemaker on the side, a banker, a custodian, a restaurant owner, a customer service representative, or whatever you do—it’s a side job compared to this great ministry that we have been called to share in.

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