

## Romans 1\_8-15.mp3.mp3

**Todd Fletcher** [00:00:05] "First, I think, my God, through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to some spiritual gift to strengthen you that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 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 among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." Thus reads the words of the Lord you may be seated.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:01:15] So as I mentioned earlier, Paul lives for the harvest, he is oriented his entire life towards gathering fruit. Jesus Himself, our Lord, lived this way, that was His food was to do the will of the Father. We see that Paul follows Jesus's example in his life where he is constantly on mission. And when you think about harvesting, you need to realize all the work that goes into a harvest. I listened to a sermon once where the pastor gave an illustration of baby carrots. Do you know how much work goes into baby carrots? There is no such thing as a baby carrot, naturally, they are made into baby carrots, big carrots turning into baby carrots. There's entire plants dedicated to taking giant carrots and making them look like these little tiny cute, little circular oval shaped carrots. I thought there were really baby carrots out there, but I was corrected by this pastor. But, you know, there's more work that goes into a baby carrot than just shaping a big carrot into a small carrot and that is all of the planting. Listen to all the process of, from the seed to your table that a baby carrot goes through. First, the soil has to be prepared, scarifying has to be scarred, the soil has to have some type of plow or till that goes through it and perhaps before that the soil had to rest for a season so that the nutrients could exist. So the soil has to be cared for, that the way that the seeds are cast into the soil, the sowing is important. Depending on the type of fruit, depending on the type of vegetable, has different types of, there are different methods for sowing. So the farmer has to know not only how to prepare the soil, but also how to sow the seed. And we see that this takes great effort and great study to know how to plant these seeds. Also you have to fertilize the soil, so after you plant the seed, you have to cover the seed, you have to water the seeds, you have to fertilize the soil, not too much, not too little it takes a lot of work. And then finally, after months and months comes the harvest.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:03:42] You know, I think sometimes as Americans in the 21st century, we forget all the work that goes into the food that we eat. You go to the grocery store and you have really a king's option before you king's menu. Even the greatest, wealthiest men and women throughout history couldn't imagine what we have in grocery stores. Spices from all around the world, any type of vegetable at any time, not just during their natural seasons, but also in their unnatural seasons, they're just more expensive. There's a lot that goes into the grocery store, there's a lot of work, but we just are so used to getting a harvest that we can be rightly dubbed the microwave society. You know, when you think about your children and they and you're preparing lunch or dinner and they're just like, oh, how long is it going to take? I've been waiting for a minute. The microwave is going as quick as it can son, just wait, isn't that crazy? I talked to Andrew and Kerri Mendor, they're two of our missionaries in Africa right now, they're in Grand Junction, but Kerri explained what her normal day was like in the Bush in Africa and Uganda and she says she has time for nothing else but survival. In the morning she wakes up and she begins to do the

laundry which takes all day, the dishes take all day, the cooking takes all day, the cleaning takes all day, no vacuum cleaners, no dishwashers, no washers and dryers. And she said by the time the day is over, I have done nothing but live to survive. And I think as Americans in the, you know first world, or so it's called, we just don't understand the work that's necessary for harvest. And we all want the harvest now, we want to see spiritual benefit now, we want to see fruit now, and if we don't see it we just move on.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:05:49] You see this in churches, the way people treat churches, they just go from one church to the next trying to itch that scratch that they have, but they're not willing to put in the time, the effort that relationships take. Paul knew better than anyone how much work the harvest took. He really reaped quite a lot of spiritual fruit, didn't he? Perhaps there's no one on the planet save Christ Jesus, who has reaped more spiritual fruit among people than Paul. And then you add in his writings and the fruit that has produced fruit through the millennia and he is truly an amazing man. But Paul is also a humble man, and I think what we're going to see here is fascinating but he oriented his entire life for the harvest. We're going to see three things here, first, he was thankful for the harvest and he thanks his God for every bit of harvest that he has ever received, we'll see that in verse eight. And then second, he prays for the harvest every day constantly versus nine through 10, prayer is his main work. And then finally, Paul wants to share in the harvest versus 11 through 15. So he's thankful for the harvest, he prays for the harvest and he wants to share in the harvest, he is fruit oriented. He really likes baby carrots, I'm just kidding, that's not even a fruit. But, I want to ask you the question, are you oriented towards the harvest? Or what type of harvest are you oriented towards? What is the goal of your life's mission? What things do you focus on when you wake up and when you go to bed? These are all important questions that we should ask ourselves, what if everything went correct in my life, what would be the harvest that I have been aiming at? Christians ought to work for, pray for, and long for a spiritual harvest that's the whole orientation of Paul's life, that's the whole orientation of Jesus's life. Is a spiritual harvest, not only in and of themselves, a spiritual harvest of growth in themselves, seeing how much they're growing into Christ's likeness individually, but also a harvest and everyone around them. Paul was not so self focused, so self consumed that he only prayed for himself. You can tell a lot by your prayer life, can't you? Who do you pray for all the time? Some of us don't even pray, those of us who do pray, maybe 95 percent of our prayers are about me, about things that I want. But what we should see is that prayer, not only we should not only pray for ourselves, but pray for others, not only pray for this church, but pray for other churches, not only pray for this country, but pray for all countries. This outward focus is so amazing in Paul.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:09:00] And so if you will, look at verse eight, he says this, he begins with "first," now there's no second and there's no third, don't waste your time trying to find them. So he begins the section with a grammatical mistake, just kidding, of course not. But what he says is 'first' of "first importance." The very first thing I want to draw your attention to after I've introduced myself as an apostle of Jesus Christ and I've already talked about a full fledged Christology, about is incarnational, how he was, how he was fully man and also fully God. He goes on to say, "first," the very first thing on to present to you is my thankfulness. I'm thankful, my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you." First, before anything else, I want to express my thankfulness. In our prayer life, this is a really good way to begin is acknowledging God's amazing holiness, "our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," to get your eyes situated on the Father and then to begin to think through things that you're thankful for. I'm thankful for Your Grace, I'm thankful that You've adopted me as your child. I'm thankful for all the things that

You've given, I'm thankful for a car that works, I'm thankful for a house that covers my head, I'm I'm thankful for children who bring joy and and pleasure into my life. I'm thankful for a spouse who loves me. I'm thankful for my singleness and the friends that you've put in my life. Thankfulness is such an important way to begin, isn't it? You know, we have one day set aside in America for thankfulness, and then that night comes Black Friday where the most greed, and you actually will run over people to get a new television, isn't that just so ironic? Let's set aside one day for thankfulness, but that night we will plunder Wal-Mart.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:11:20] But look at Paul, he says, first I want to thank my God. Well, this is my God, too, isn't it, Paul? This is his God, this is the God that he claims as his own, he has a personal relationship with this God, this God is his Father. He knows this God, he loves this God, he'll die for this God, it's his God, it's my God through Jesus Christ, that is the only access that anyone has to God, and that is through Jesus Christ. Paul knows that He's not my God because of anything I've done, He's my God because of what Jesus' has done and in Jesus Christ I can now claim Him as my God. I want to thank my God, I'm not thanking you for the fruit that I've seen in your church, I'm thanking my God for the fruit that I see in your church. You know, if we wrote this letter, we might start, I think you Romans for being so awesome. He says, I thank my God, through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. Now you're going to see this in Romans, and I think, you know surprisingly, I haven't seen this message emphasized too often in sermon series on Romans. And that is Paul seems to be aiming at one very important thing throughout the entire book, and that is ethnic unity. Unity between Jews and Gentiles, between Greeks and Barbarians, they have a lot to offer this church but he says this, to a church that's had great conflict among people, groups and classes. You know, Rome was a unique place that had many slaves, that had people that had been brought from all around the world. It had your upper elite that were untouchable and then it had the bottom rung of people that were untouchables. And he begins by saying, I thank, my God through Christ Jesus for all of you, not just for you, for all of you, don't miss that, all of you, this is going to be a major theme in his letter.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:13:39] Look at verse 16, I just heard a battle cry from back there, verse 16, this is the thesis statement of the entire book verses 16 and 17, "for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to," underline it, "everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith." This is, we're going to do a whole sermon on that next week, because this is two of the most important verses in your Bible verses 16 and 17. But we're going to push that off, what we need to see is he's after everyone, the gospel is for everyone. I'm going to get off on a tangent because I can, that's what preachers do, they get off on tangents. And in first we see this as he focuses in on ethnic conflict, now does this have any application to our culture today? Yes. You know, it's interesting when you look at American history, you'll actually see that we have we've been in much worst, worst periods of time when it comes to racism in our in our culture, in our country. If you go back to the 1960s, you'll see actually in our legal books, in our law, there was racism. There was no equality on any level back in the 1960s between whites and blacks, specifically. But then you had the civil rights movement, thank God, for people like Martin Luther King Jr., who preached the equality of all people made in the image of God. And we moved quite a long ways since the 1960s, we've really progressed in equality. But I bet you if you asked the average 18 year old, is this the worst racism has ever been in our country, they would say absolutely. Why is that? Well, if you're familiar with, I don't want to get too down the rabbit hole, but if you're familiar with Karl Marx and socialism and communism, what he tries to do in order to tear things down is to create class warfare. And in our situation, it's ethnic warfare, this is called neo Marxism. That's

what we see today all around us as neo Marxism rather than class warfare, the rich versus the poor, what we see is white versus black. And that's obviously there are more ethnicities than that, but that's really what it comes down to. In fact, I've heard Marxists say let's substitute rich for white and poor for black, and let's encourage the black to overthrow the whites.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:16:39] The problem with this message is it is so contrary to the gospel. Too many churches have joined what has been referred to as the social gospel, and they're preaching a non gospel from their very pulpits, they're confusing the gospel for what the world proclaims as truth. I heard one pastor say the problem with the world is, is when you give them one pound of flesh, they want two, and then three is an old child book that says if you give a mouse a cookie, he'll ask for a glass of milk, right? So there is major ethnic problems here in the Church of Rome, major ethnic problems and Paul's first stance is not to say I need you Jews to recognize that you have a Jewish superiority, and I need you Greeks to recognize that these Barbarians actually should be promoted above the interests of the other Greeks. The point is, is Paul's answer to ethnic conflict is not ethnic solutions, it's the gospel of Jesus Christ. And the church is suffering greatly right now because we cannot remember what we're called to preach. Does God care about racial reconciliation? Absolutely, we're one race, Adam, humanity, different colors, one race, how do we redeem that race? One message, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The enemy seeks to divide, he seeks us to focus on differences, but Paul, rather than pointing out the difference between Jew and Greek and wise and fools, what he says is, I am obligated to all of you with one message and that is the message that I've been entrusted with which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:18:43] So let's get back on topic. First, I thank, my God, through Jesus Christ for all of you, Jew, Greek, barbarian, rich, poor, wise, foolish, because your faith is proclaimed throughout all the world. What we see here is that the Romans have something incredibly commendable about them, and that is that their faith is proclaimed, their faith is famous. There's an old phrase, all roads lead to Rome, we use it today, that means that it all connects back to...you know and our point is, yeah, the thing you just said, everything connects back to it. That phrase comes from history, which is all roads lead to Rome because all roads actually lead to Rome in the modern world or in that time in ancient Rome. Why that is, is because Rome was an empire, they had gone through great lengths, they had worked very hard to connect all of their empire to the capital city, Rome, and as the legions would go out, they would build roads. So that they could establish trade and established power. By God's grace, the gospel hits the scene in the best moment in history for communication. Had the gospel just come 100 years, 200, 300 years earlier during Alexander the Great conquests in Greece, there were not roads, to connect every, roads to connect every aspect of the empire. God in His divine providence waited until Rome had established a universal network of communication before the gospel hits the scene, that's just one of many amazing things about God's providence. But what we also see here is that these people's faith have become famous. Why? Turn to Romans, 16:19, Romans 16:19 Paul says this, "for your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil." What he says is, the reason you are famous is because of your obedience. Again, arguing for the point that you cannot separate faith and obedience, you cannot have Jesus as Savior and not as Lord. That you see that, throughout Scripture, Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And the Romans not only talked the good talk, they walked the walk. And here's the biggest difference, is they were famous because of persecution and their obedience in the midst of persecution. He's going to correct a deadly pill that they have swallowed, which is the inherent conflict between classes and races and ethnicities in their

church. But what he is after is, one, he begins by thanking God for their faithful obedience in the midst of persecution. Well, Nero is not on the scene yet, so how can there be persecution? What persecution is he talking about, I thought until Nero, everything was hunky dory. No. Claudius had such a big issue with Christians and Christ Himself that he banned he excommunicated all Jews from Rome. Why would you do that? Because there was a lot of rioting happening, there was conflict. Well, where'd the conflict come from from within the Jewish community itself? Well what were they rioting over Christ? Some Jews had accepted and embraced Jesus Christ as the Messiah and other Jews were so furious with Jesus that they rioted to the point where Claudius expels them from Rome. So even just among the Jewish population in the church, there was major conflicts, families fighting families, brothers separating from brother, father attacking son so much that the emperor had to step in and bring in his edict. Not only that, there's clear conflict, conflict between Greeks and Jews.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:23:14] There's a lot of conflict in this church, there's high tension in this church, but one thing is for sure, there is a faithful remnant that has been obedient in the midst of all the persecution that the early church suffered in Rome and its world famous. That's a big deal, so we see here that Paul is saying, I first want to thank you for your faithful obedience in the midst of persecution. There's so much humility that exudes from what we're about to go on to read, but I want to ask you, do you begin with obedience? Do you begin with thankfulness to God? A.W. Tozer says this, "gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poor, but richer for having made it." Thankfulness. It's something you can give to God, no matter how poor you are and you are richer for giving it. And Paul begins with thankfulness and then he goes on to one of the more convicting sections and all of Romans which is versus 9 and 10, he says, "for God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son that without ceasing, I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you." Well, why is this the most convicting passage in Romans? Well, the reason why is because it's about your prayer life. Notice he says this, God is my witness that I remember you, I pray for you without ceasing. A church he's never met, a people that he's never seen, and he makes an oath before the Lord saying, I pray for you all the time. How many of us would dare make that oath for anyone? God is my witness, I've prayed for you without ceasing all week long, you would look at me and say, have you really? But Paul means it.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:25:39] Well, this brings up another problem, what about the oath itself? If you remember the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says something pretty important with regards to oaths, let's turn to Matthew Chapter 5. Matthew Chapter 5, and this is something we need to clear up because people have asked this question to me a couple of times, and I think it's something when you hit it in Paul's writings you need to wrestle with it and that's what we're going to do. So, Matthew chapter 5, starting in verse 33, Jesus talks about oaths and around the dinner table a couple of nights ago, we read this passage is our family devotional, and it was right after Knox had asked me to pinky promise him that I wouldn't go back on my word. And I thought how sad is that, that my son thinks I have to pinky promise him to keep my word, there's something clearly wrong about that. So, but it was great because right after that we talked about this section in Scripture. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "again you have heard that it was said of the of those of old you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, do not take an oath," and that's exactly what Paul just did, as he said, as God is my witness, I'm telling you the truth. "Do not take an oath either by heaven, for it is the throne of God or by Earth, for it is His footstool or by Jerusalem, for is the city of the Great

King, and do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say simply be yes or no anything more than this comes from evil."

**Todd Fletcher** [00:27:12] So let's go back to Paul, Paul makes this oath, this formula many times in his writings, I'll give you the references, 2 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Thessalonians 2:5 and verse 10, Romans 9:1, 2 Corinthians 11:31, Galatians 1:20. Paul uses this phrase, God is my witness. So is there a conflict between Jesus's teaching on oaths and Paul's use of oaths? No, there can't be. Why? It's in scripture. Paul uses oaths in a way that's not sinful and in a way that doesn't violate Jesus's teaching, what was Jesus teaching? Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is dealing with the heart. He's dealing with a false religious elite that is very hypocritical, and they use oaths in these types of things in order for loopholes. They'll say one thing, but they'll say it just so that they can actually go against the very oath that they were saying in our in our modern day vernacular, it's actually a sign. It's this (crossing your fingers) you put it behind your back, I don't know if people still do that. But, what Jesus is getting after is hypocritical oaths, oaths that you are intentionally being deceitful for and he says instead of making these kind of, you know, fluffy statements and and trying to sound holy, but you know, you're going to do the other thing he says, simply let your yes be yes and your no be no. He's calling for people to be men and women of their word. And Paul, 100 percent agrees with that, that everything you say should be on the same level of you saying, I swear, I promise, or, you know, pinky swear. Because we're men and women of our word, but when Paul uses this, every time he says this, he's saying something very important after it. Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, whenever He says that, pay attention. If Jesus says truly, truly, I say to you, that means He's saying, listen up, get your highlighter out, I'm ready to say something important. When Paul says with God as my witness, he's about to say something very important. So here it is with God as my witness, whom I serve with my spirit, this word serve is more often translated worship. Whom I worship, serve, service is worship, they're synonyms in many ways. Whom I worship with my spirit, otherwise heart with who I worship, with all my heart, who I serve, with all my spirit in the gospel of His Son. This is a very important thing he's about to say. He says not only is God my witness with what I'm about to say, I serve God with every ounce of my being or attempt to. And then he says that without ceasing, I mentioned you. This is what's so important that is praying for this church.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:30:23] We, some of us might have saved our ammo for a loftier statement, with God is my witness, with all my heart, I remember you, we might have saved that for some high doctrinal theology. With God is my witness, with all my heart, I want to say that Christ is the King, yes and amen, Christ is the King. But Paul uses his ammo on this, that I pray for you all the time. Why is that so important? Why is Paul's prayer life so important? Because Paul's prayer life is the overflow of his worship. If you struggle with prayer, it's right here that you don't worship enough. Paul is so focused on God, his whole life is so oriented towards God, he worships God day and night, he attempts to at least. That by worshipping God, he can't help but to pray for others, that they too might experience the same type of worship that he experiences the same type of relationship that he experiences on a regular basis. Prayer is the overflow of worship when your eyes are on God, you can't help but to talk to Him, isn't that amazing?

**Todd Fletcher** [00:31:56] If you struggle with prayer, here's your answer. Set your eyes on God and you'll talk to Him, think about Him in the morning, think about Him in the evening. And I am as guilty as anyone when it comes to prayer. I am just like every other American who attempts to love the Lord, but struggles with his iPhone, I'm easily distracted. This is where self-discipline comes in, this is where routine comes in and this is where in the

morning, you know, Bible before breakfast, according to my wife. Set your eyes on God and you're going to talk to Him and Paul says that without ceasing, he thinks about a church he's never seen, people he's never known. On top of all the other churches that he prays for without ceasing, that he's planted, brothers and sisters who are in prison, for Christ's sake. And what you see from Paul here is that prayer is his very lifeline and he says this, for I long to see you, that's where we're going next. But before we get there, I want to get one more thing on prayer. This is an amazing illustration and please pay attention to me, because what is the point of prayer, notice back at verse 10, let's look carefully, he says, "always in my prayers, asking, pleading that somehow by God's will," underline that, "I may now at last succeed in coming to you." In all of his prayers, he so desires to be with the Romans, he so longs and we're about to read, to share a spiritual gift with them, to strengthen them, to encourage them in the midst of persecution, so much so that its famous persecution throughout the world. He says, I think of you so much and I'm constantly praying for you, pleading that somehow by God's will I might come to you. You remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane pleading, praying to His Father, God if there is any other way, may this cup pass from Me, not My will but Yours? This is how you pray. You pray so that your heart and your mind and your life can be on track with God's heart, God's mind and God's plan. You have not because you ask not or you ask with wrong intentions, however, God will give you the desires of your heart if you seek first His kingdom, if you're seeking God. God is sovereign above all things, your prayers do not change His plan, but they change your heart.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:35:01] That's so important when it comes to prayer, your prayers do not force God into a full Nelson and force Him to do something that He doesn't want to do but you're praying so good that God has to do it. God is going to do what God's going to do, He's already established it, He's the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, all things work according to His purposes for the good of those who love Him. Prayer is about us getting in line with God and asking our Father for good things because He's a good Father and He loves to give good gifts and and He says you have not because you ask not, meaning there are things He withholds from us because we're not praying. But Paul understands that all prayers are under God's sovereign will. And listen to this, this is such an amazing illustration, it's a little bit longer so I'll give us breaks, intermissions, you can go to the bathroom and get some concessions, but this is worth it. Listen, this is from Barnhouse, who says, in light of God's sovereignty ain our prayer life, he says this, "we will suppose the case of a man who loves violin music, he has the means to buy for himself a very fine violin, he also purchases the very best radio obtainable," wow this is old, "he builds up a library of great musical scores so that he is able to take any piece that is announced on the radio, put it on his music stand and play along with the orchestra. The announcer says that Mr. Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra are going to play Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, the man in his home puts that symphony on and stands and tunes in his violin. With what he hears, coming from the orchestra, the music that comes from the radio we might call foreordained. Whether or not, he plays correctly the music on the radio is going to play correctly, it's foreordained music. Ormandy is going to follow the score, just as Beethoven wrote it, the man in his living room starts to scratch away at the first violin part, he misses beats, he loses his place, he finds it again, he breaks a string," sounds like Chris, just kidding, just kidding Chris, I'm just saying about the breaking the string part, "and stops to fix it. The music goes on and on, and he finds his place again and plays on after his fashion to the end of the symphony. The announcer names the next work that is to be played, and the fiddler puts that number on his rack day after week, month after year, he finds pleasure in scraping his fiddle along with the violins of the great orchestra. Their music is determined in advance, what he must do is learn to play their tempo in their key and to follow the score as it has been written in advance. If he

decides that he wants to play Yankee Doodle when the orchestra is in the midst of Brahms number they're going to be there's going to be dissonance and discord in the man's house, but not in the Academy of Music, the music on the radio still plays the same, even though he may decide to play Yankee Doodle" Don't worry this all makes sense, if you need to take a bathroom break, please go ahead and do that now, just kidding, we'll will keep going this is so good. I'm breaking all the preaching rules by giving you such a long quote, but it's...stick with me. "After some years of this man, maybe a rather, after some years this man may be a rather credible violin player and he may have learned to submit himself utterly to the scores that are written and to follow the program as played, harmony and joy come from submission and cooperation." Well, how does this relate to prayer? I'm glad you asked. It goes on. "So it is with the plan of God, it is rolling towards us, unfolding day by day as He has planned it before the foundations of the world. There are those who fight against it and who must utterly be cast into darkness because He will not have in His heaven those who are proud, who proudly resist Him, thus cannot be tolerated any more than the authorities would permit a man to bring his own violin into the Academy of Music and to start to play Shostakovich," wow, "when the program called for Bach. The score of God's plan is set forth in the Bible. In the measure that I learn it and submit myself to it and seek to live in accordance with all that is there in, I shall find myself in joy and in harmony with God and His plans" This is so important, you guy, this is why I'm taking time with this quote.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:40:08] Because if you can get this one thing that I'm talking about right now, your prayer life will blow up in a positive way. It'll grow like miracle grow, right? "If I set myself to fight against it or disagree with that which comes forth, there can be no peace in my heart and life, if my heart I seek to play a tune that is not the melody of the Lord's, there can be nothing but dissonance. Prayer is learning to play the tune that the eternal plan of God calls for, and to do that which is in harmony with the will of the eternal Composer and Author of all things." That, my dear friends is praye, is to submit yourself to the God who has prepared your steps before you so that you might walk in them. Who has planned your life in eternity past and who has no Plan B for you. Prayer is about you getting on God's plan and tuning your heart to His, that's why He says that He will give you the desires of your heart if you're seeking Him because He'll align your desires to His desires. And Paul lives every day to align his will with God's and he prays for everyone else around him, that they also would align their will with God's. And he says this now in verse 11, that's why I said it's one of the most convicting verses in the Bible in Romans is Romans 1:9 and 10, because you just see a man's prayer life on fire. He's not intending to promote his prayer life to this, this is just who Paul is. And then versus 11 through 15, this is his humility, it gets worse for us, he says, "For I long to see you, I pant to just see you in Rome that I may share, I may impart to some spiritual gift to strengthen you," I love this, he goes, "but that is that is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" Notice if verse 12 wasn't there versus 11 could sound like he's kind of pulling rank, I've come to visit you to give you a spiritual gift. But he says, oh no that's not what I mean to sound like, in the next verse, he says that is, that is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. Paul, an apostle, Paul who has just displayed absolute authority as an apostle, set apart for the office before his very birth. Paul, who just displayed an amazing gift in his faithfulness and his desire to pray for others, Paul says, I longed to share something spiritual with you and also for you to share something with me. What did Paul have to gain from these Romans? Their example of obedience and their faith under persecution. They encouraged Paul, but he also wanted to encourage them. What is it that Paul has to offer these people? They have a problem and their problem is with conflict among ethnic groups, but they have something that's pretty amazing as well, and that is faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the



midst of persecution, so we can't be so cut and dry with churches. Jesus writes the church of Ephesus that He's so thankful for their obedience to the gospel, He's so thankful that they have remained true to doctrine, good apostolic doctrine, but Jesus says, but I have one problem with you and that's you forgot your first love. Paul says, I'm so thankful for your obedience to the faith in the midst of your persecution, and I can learn so much from you. But I have something to give you that you desperately need, and that is a gospel that is for everyone. Not just Jews, not just Gentiles, for everyone, that's what Paul has to give them, to encourage them, to strengthen them, the one thing Paul has to give to these people is the gospel that unites. And he goes on to say this verse 13, "I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you." I've wanted to give you this gift for so long, "But thus far, I have been prevented." By who? By God in order that I may reap some fruit, reap some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. Paul is saying, I just want to share a little bit of fruit with you. What was he prevented by? Well, probably Claudius order, no Jews in Rome. Paul was a Jew, he wasn't allowed in Rome. He intended to be there, he wanted to be with them, but he was prevented by God's sovereignty. But all he wanted was to share in the harvest with them. He thanked God for the harvest that they already had, he prayed for more harvest and he says, I want to share in this harvest. Why does he want to share in a harvest that he didn't labor for? He did labor for it, in prayer, think about that.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:45:45] You can partake in missions around the world, in harvest for them, work labor for them to share and harvest through prayer. Monty taught this to the men's group just a couple of weeks ago, some people say, I'll pray, pray for you, that's the least I can do. And Monty said, isn't that such a terrible thing? It's the most you can do, prayer is the most you can do, it's not the least you can do, it's the most you can do. I'm going to pray for you and I'm going to go to the One that has all power and authority and all things that can care for you and fix the situation. I will pray for you that's the most I can do, not the least I can do. And he says this, this is where he looks at them directly and he says, I am under obligation both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to wise and to foolish, so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. Paul says this, I'm under obligation not only to the Jews, remember Romans 1:16, to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles, he says, I'm not only under obligation to the Jews, I'm also under obligation to the Greeks and to you Greeks, I'm also under obligation to the Barbarians. Well, I thought all Gentiles, you know, Jews and Gentiles, why this third category, Greeks, Barbarians, because the Greeks were prideful people, they had Aristotle, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, they had Alexander the Great, they had Hellenization, Rome was so envious of their culture that when Rome stepped in, they borrowed everything and claimed it for themselves. They called themselves Greeks, even though they were Romans, interesting huh? But to be a Greek was to be intelligent, educated, wise, not like those Barbarians. That word comes from the word bar bar bar bar bar bar bar, meaning they just sound like they're just saying bar bar bar bar bar bar. They're so stupid, they're so foolish, they're not trained in Aristotle, they don't know how to make marble statues of people.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:48:00] Paul says, I'm not only under obligation to the Greeks but even to the Barbarians that this gospel is for everyone, and that he serves everyone. I think we can learn from that. How do we unite? People in conflict, how do we unite a nation that's divided, how do we unite our families that are ripping apart at the seams along political lines? How do we unite with our neighbor, how do we unite with our coworkers? You guys know it's the gospel. We don't need to preach social justice from the pulpit. We need to preach the gospel. You need to preach the gospel, this world needs the gospel, nothing else, nothing else. Paul says, I didn't come to you speaking words of wisdom, I didn't come speaking with words of eloquence, I came preaching Christ crucified, period, end of story.

**Todd Fletcher** [00:49:09] That's what we preach. I've ran out of time, but I want to say this about Jesus, Jesus lived for the harvest in the in the story with the Good Samaritan or the Samaritan woman you see that He addresses a woman who is really struggling with sin, and there's a moment where Jesus shouldn't be talking to her because He's a Jewish Rabbi, the other disciples show up and they're they're asking Him if He's hungry and and He says, no, I'm not hungry, I'm full. And they say, well, who's giving You food? And Jesus says, I'm not talking about physical food, He says my food is to do the will of the Father. And they're confused and they wonder, well, don't you want some food, Jesus, I know you're doing God's will, but You should probably eat some food. And what you see, He goes on to talk about is the harvest, He looks at the Samaritan woman and He looks at His disciples and He says the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few. This is His harvest, this is his focus. She goes back to her village, shares everything that Jesus said to her, the whole village seems to be converted and they all come running back to Jesus. And if you do any study on this, many of them, many of the men are probably wearing white turbans, white head coverings. The field is white, the field is ripe for the harvest. He sees all these unsaved people coming towards Him, and that is His harvest. That was Paul's harvest's as well, let it be our harvest. Let's live for the gospel, let's pray. Father God, we thank You for Jesus, we thank You for Paul. Thank You for Your word, and we thank You for the gospel. God our nation is ripped apart right now in so many different ways and there's so much 'us' versus 'them' in class conflict and ethnic conflict, God and I pray that You would heal our nation with the gospel, that churches would be healed with the gospel, that our families would be healed with the gospel. And Lord, I thank You for the gospel, that in the gospel, You are our God through Jesus Christ, and we pray for everyone in Jesus name, Amen.