

Romans 1v8-15

Additional Reading form Mark 3:13-35

Introduction

Having begun the chapter describing the call he received, the Gospel he was called to preach, and the readers to whom he preached, Paul reveals more of himself, his desire to visit the Roman church, his attitude to God's will in his travels, and his anxiety to reach others with the Gospel.

Paul's longing to see his readers

After about 1900 years the warm affection of this passage still breathes through it, and we can feel Paul's great heart throbbing with love for Christians he had never seen. Here was the problem for Paul. He had never been in Rome, and had had no share in the founding of the Roman church (and neither had Peter). Perhaps they were a bit suspicious of him. How was he to introduce himself as an apostle to Gentiles? How could he disarm their suspicions? He had to make them feel he was not there to intrude or interfere. He had to get alongside them to get rid of barriers of strangeness and suspicion.

Naturally, as one especially commissioned to labour in Gentile lands, he was especially interested in the church in the greatest city of the Roman Empire. He was anxious to do what he could to help the work forward and to strengthen the faith of the young Christians, and put their Christian witness on stronger foundations. Also, he planned to visit Rome soon, so he needed to ensure a good relationship with his readers.

Therefore, in wisdom and love, he began with a compliment. He told them he was grateful to God for their faith about which the whole world knew. There are some people whose tongues are tuned to appreciation, and others to criticism. Some look for virtues, others for faults. It was said of Thomas Hardy that if he went into a country field he would always see, not the wild flowers, but the dung heap in the corner. The fact is that we always get more people by appreciation than by criticism.

There were two early Iona missionaries to the Saxons. The first, in 630AD, returned speaking of the stubborn and barbarous disposition of the English. Then Aiden went in 635AD. Before going he said "I think brother you have been too severe for these ignorant hearers. You should have led them on gently". It was Aiden's gentleness that won Northumbria, whose people were repelled by the critical severity of his brother monk.

Although Paul did not know these people, he prayed constantly to God for them (and also the Colossians). His love was also shown in his longing, intense yearning: **I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established** (1:11). The Greek word used for "spiritual gift" Χαρισμα can be translated miraculous gift, but the context suggests instruction to strengthen faith and

expand faith more effectively and perfectly, so that they may be more mature and have a firmer grasp of Jesus Christ, His love and His power.

This affection is very moving, and such affection should characterise the Christian worker and preacher. Alexander MacLaren was once away from his congregation for some while (in Australia). He did not think it was good to profess affection for his congregation normally, but felt he must do so at that time. Hence his delight at seeing them again, and reuniting the bonds. Mutual affection between pulpit and pew is something to thank God for, to be encouraged and deepened. “Unless there is this manly, honest, though often silent, Christian affection, the sooner you and I part, the better”. The preacher can do no good for his congregation if there is no love in his heart. No congregation will ever listen and profit if they are listening with carping criticism or stolid indifference. There must be a real, though usually concealed, mutual affection and regard – main thing binding the nonconformist preacher to his congregation.

And note also his humility before these people. The great apostle of the gentiles, the channel of God’s gift to them, in his turn seeks to receive help from them “**That I may be comforted** (the Greek here *συμπαρακληθηναι* means “strengthened”) **and encouraged among you because of your faith**” (1:12). Their help would banish his depression and give him renewed courage. He had as much to receive as to give.

We all have much to learn from one another, pew from pulpit and vice versa. Students have much to learn from the experience of those instructing them and from constructive criticism. Nothing to learn from empty flattery – only way to ruin! React to one another. The spirit and attitude we create for one another either builds us up or lowers the spiritual temperature and mars spiritual life. The pew’s strength and weakness is due in part to the pulpit. The pulpit’s strength and weakness is due in part to the pew.

Let us be helpers one of another, encourage one another and strengthen one another in the warfare and work to which we are called and consecrated. We both need to be a blessing, and to obtain a blessing, to both give and to get.

Presence, and attitude and words can impart strength and encouragement to all. Calvin said “In the Christian church no one is so poor as not to be able to confer on us some important benefit; but our pride hinders us from reaping these mutual advantages”. Let’s make the most of fellowship with our own fellow Christians.

Paul’s Submission to God’s Will

Paul had never seen these people, though he often planned to see them but was hindered so far. Now he is longing to see them again, and he has committed the matter to the Lord, praying that he might get there in God’s will. **Making request I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you** (1:10). He had a strong desire, which he expressed to the Lord, but everything was subject to God’s will. All plans and all prayers were under this great qualification. In the end, all was dependent on what God wanted, and Paul was gladly willing to accept that.

Earlier in the chapter Paul described himself as a bondsman of Jesus Christ, belonging wholly to his master. The outworking of this is that prayers and plans are under the Lord's direction. This is underlined in Scripture:

“Teach me to do thy will for thou art my God” (Psalm 143:10)

“For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother”. (Matthew 12:50)

Jesus said **“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me”**. (John 4:34)

Jesus wished the cup to be removed from him, but **“thy will be done”**. (Matthew 26:42)

Slaves were instructed to **“do the will of God from the heart”**. (Ephesians 6:6.)

“If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that”. (James 4:15.)

Ultimately it was in God's will to enable Paul to go to Rome, but in circumstances he did not anticipate – as a prisoner appealing to Caesar. God's will is often unexpected and strange. At the end of our lives, and often before, we shall see its wisdom and marvel at it. Only as we are subject to it does life make sense. Holidays, careers, choices, friends are in his hands. Times are in God's hands. All our ways are at his disposal. “In his will is our peace” Dante.

Paul's sense of Indebtedness to the unsaved

“I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise” (1:14). “Greeks” does not merely apply to natives of Greece, but to all who knew the culture and outlook of Greece. A barbarian meant a man who says “bar bar” ie. who speaks with uncouth tongue, in contrast to the beautiful language of Greece. Paul is saying here that he is a debtor to the wise and the simple, the cultured and the uncultured, the educated and the uneducated. He owed the Gospel to everyone. His message was for the whole world. John Wesley said “The world is my parish”. We owe the Gospel to others. We share common humanity with the rest of the world even though there are many differences. We share the same air, the same light, the same food and drink, we have similar outlooks, abilities, hopes, fears, actions and reactions, common possession of the image of God, common sin, common bondage and guilt and liability to bondage. We are from the same human family, and we therefore desire to impart to our fellows what we have. We are our brothers' keeper.

The Gospel has brought us the experience of Salvation. Christ has drawn us to himself that through us he might draw others, to increase the flock that gathers around the one Saviour. It is the **day of good tidings** (2 Kings 7:9), and we must not hold our peace. We have a responsibility to get the Gospel out to everyone regardless of colour or race, to tell him of his need, the danger he is in, and the way of release. Obligation receives additional weight because proved adaptation of Gospel to all sorts and conditions of men. Alone of all religions of the world, our Gospel is capable of reaching and changing and influencing for good every tongue and race and every stage of civilization. Essentially a worldwide religion. There is yet to be found a race incapable of receiving the Gospel and beyond need of it.

We must pay our debts, owe no man anything, but instead, discharge debt to the whole world by service, gifts and prayers. We are not at liberty to choose whether we should do our part in making Christ known. We are in debt. We have no special merit,

no worth over and above our duty. We are in debt. This sense of obligation is at the root of all genuine service. The man who says "I am a debtor" does his utmost and best work for Christ. Therefore Paul desires to be ready to preach the Gospel also to the Christians in Rome.

At the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny, Sir Colin Campbell, later Lord Clyde, was asked how long it would take him to get ready to start for India. "I am ready now" was his reply.

"I am a Debtor" and "I am ready" are at the very heart of all true work of God. Pay all debts and be in readiness for the master's call. Hudson Taylor said "Every day 33,000 and every month 1,000,000 subjects of Chinese Empire pass into eternity without having heard the Gospel" Those figures are very out of date.

Conclusion

- Paul was longing to be with the Christians in Rome.
- He also wanted to be in God's will above all else.
- He felt in debt to give the Gospel to others.