

Marks of a Missionary Church Planter

Romans 15:22-33

Dr. David Harrell

February 10, 2013

I trust you have prepared your hearts to receive the word this morning. I will be preaching to you from Paul's epistle to the Romans. We find ourselves now in Romans chapter 15 and we will be looking this morning at verses 22 through 33. I have entitled my discourse to you "Marks of a Missionary Church Planter," obviously referring to the apostle Paul.

Let me read the text and then we will look at it more closely. Romans 15:22:

"For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you but now with no further place for me in these regions and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain for I hope to see you in passing and to be helped on my way by you when I have first enjoyed your company for awhile. But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs I will go on by way of you to Spain. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Now, I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those who were disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

I never cease to be amazed at the power of the gospel of Christ. Think about it, every corner of the globe hears the Word. People, dead in their trespasses and sins, spiritual cadavers in darkness. Suddenly by the power of the spirit and His Word, people begin to see the truth of who they are and who they can be in Christ, and people are saved. Then we meet these people in various places during the course of our life and as soon as we greet them we can sense that they are a brother or a sister in Christ. We experience that last Wednesday night when we had the dear saints here that are from Argentina, the missionaries there. What a joy that was, Eduardo and Gloria. Just think about it, numerous countries, and countries all over the world that was once dark and blind suddenly see the light of the gospel and people are saved.

If you think about it, once upon a time, someone in a country where your ancestors were and even where you are here, gave you the gospel and by the power of the Spirit you too were saved. But now think of the days before the gospel was being preached. Think of the times where there was no church. I've been in some of the remote reaches of this world for example in Africa and in Siberia where it is very dark, it is very foreboding, there are no Christians, hardly at all.

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Think what it was like in the days of Jesus and then Jesus comes along, He comes to seek and to save the lost and His disciples begin to spread the word. Then at Pentecost the ministry of the Holy Spirit began to change from the way it worked in the Old Testament where in those days he would sometimes be withdrawn from a man. He didn't dwell within them constantly. But then at Pentecost, in the era of the New Covenant, He indwelt believers permanently and He is sent into the world to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgement and God through all of this begins to build His church.

Dear Christian, we are now part of this glorious enterprise. Throughout time we have seen the truth of which we are warned by the Apostle Paul, that Satan blinds the minds of the unbelieving that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Yet, the gospel penetrates all of that darkness. Here we are, twice born saints, transformed by the power of the spirit, by the living God. We are now joint heirs with Jesus and one day we will stand before Him, people from every nation and tribe and tongue. In John's vision of future glory we learn that all of the saints down through redemptive history will join the angelic host in praise. In Revelation 5: 12 we read that “the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice Worthy of the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might honor and glory and blessing.”

Now I ask you how did God accomplish so great a feat? The answer is by the power of the Spirit and the gospel. One person hears and then he tells someone else or she tells someone else and then they begin to tell others one by one, two by two, four by four, eight by eight, and it grows and it grows and then somebody had to tell you right?

Perhaps the greatest ambassador of all of the Lords servants was the apostle Paul. He, you might say, was the quintessential missionary church planter. Though, according to 2 Corinthians 10, his personal appearance was described as “unimpressive and his speech was contemptible”; even those in Galatia were said to despise and loath the condition of his body (evidently it was diseased and deformed). They nevertheless, according to Galatians 4:14, “received him as an angel of God as Christ Jesus Himself.” Such, dear friends, is the power of the Holy Spirit to work through anyone. Such is the power of all sufficient grace to give inner strength and the power to persevere and endure come what may; and then finish the spiritual race as Paul did having kept the faith and receive the crown of righteousness.

Well today we are going to learn from him as we examine this epilogue to his epistle to the Romans. And in this section he is going to connect in a very personal way to these dear saints in that first century church some of which he knew, but most he didn't. Paul's primary purpose, of course, in writing to the Romans was doctrinal. We read of all these astounding doctrines pertaining to the gospel that he had received actually from direct revelation. You will recall after his conversion, the Lord took him into the Nabatean Arabia wilderness, which was south and east of the dead sea, took him there for three

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years and taught him personally. Wouldn't you love to have that kind of training? Which, by the way, underscores the premium that God places on the need for in depth theological training for missionaries, a priority that I fear is too often ignored to the detriment of the gospel. Too often churches send out novices that are untrained, that are untested. Sometimes they are people who really couldn't do anything else in life, so they decided to be a missionary; and then the church shakes their head in dismay when those people return home defeated after their first four year term in the field.

But the Lord graciously saved Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and a self-confessed hater of Christ. Then the Lord Jesus Himself trained him and then commissioned him to be an Apostle primarily to the Gentiles, a work that he gladly did. He exhausted himself to that end. Though it ultimately led him to an executioner where he suffered martyrdom sometime between 65 and 67 A.D. But as a missionary church planter he spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire as it existed in the first century. Over three missionary journeys he covered basically the entirety of the Mediterranean world, a region that would have been about the size of the western half of the United States, from the Mississippi over to California. It is just staggering to think what he accomplished.

We are told in Acts 19:10, by Luke, "All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord both Jews and Greeks."

That is amazing. He stated earlier in chapter 15 of Romans in verse 19 that he had fully preached the gospel of Christ in the power of the Spirit from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum. By the way, that is present day Yugoslavia. We have some people in our church from Yugoslavia. In fact if you look at all of the regions that he preached which would be modern day Italy, and Greece, and Turkey, and Lebanon, and Syria, and Israel, we've got people in this church who hail from those regions. Then many others who hail from other regions all around the world. My friends once again this is the power of the gospel of Christ.

I think how different it is from all the false religions. Take for example, one of the most virulent false regions in the entire world that is spreading like fire, that of Islam. Their false god, Allah, the god of Islam, must gain converts by using the sword of man. But the God of the Christian, the triune God of the Bible, gains converts by using the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Then lowly, common, expendable, frail, preachers like me, like you, come along and preach the Word and sinners fall on their face in repentance and follow Christ.

Well this morning I wish to draw your attention to three remarkable qualities that we see in Paul's life and ministry. Marks that I would say need to be part of a missionary church, but frankly characteristics that need to be developed in every believer. They certainly need to be observed in the life of anyone that we may send to a mission field. I hope some of you young people; perhaps will be called to that end. Those marks are these:

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1. Paul was marked by sensitivity to providential leading.
2. He had an ability to promote unity.
3. He had a devotion to striving with others in prayer.

So let's look at the first one. He had sensitivity to providential leading. What is that? Well, the doctrine of God's providence, though the actual term is not found in scripture, is a doctrine that is inconceivably glorious. We see it all through scripture. It speaks of God's continuous involvement with all created things whereby He not only sustains all that He has made that they might accomplish the purpose for which He has created them, but He literally directs all things to those ends. He orchestrates all things to accomplish His eternal purposes.

In Hebrews 1:3 we are told that, "Christ upholds all things by the Word of His power." That denotes a continual carrying along of all things. Similarly in Colossians 1:17 we read that, "Christ Jesus is before all things indeed He is the creator of all things." And it goes on to say, "In Him all things hold together."

You see my friends both of these texts affirm that if Christ were to cease His supernatural work of preservation of all things in His universe then instantly all things would fly apart and cease to exist, save the triune God who created them. That is divine providence. I might add that this refutes deism that would teach that God created the world and then essentially abandoned it. It would also refute pantheism that would have us believe creation is not a distinct entity and reality apart from God who created it, but it's just all part of God. No, instead providence teaches that God actually preserves and governs everything in the universe that He has created and that therefore exists distinct from Him.

Do you ever consider this great doctrine in your life? We are going to see how sensitive Paul was to it in a moment. But make it real personal right now. Do you realize that He has infused within every cell of your body a genetic code that will perfectly obey His perfect order in your life? We read about DNA which is essentially a molecule wound up inside of the nucleus of a cell. That molecule encodes all of the genetic instructions used in developing and functioning every living organism and every virus. I was reading one scientist who said this; "It is constructed like a ladder also called a double helix. Each rung on the ladder consists of two smaller molecules and all the rungs are spaced apart equally. Although each rung has only two molecules, there are only four different molecules used in the rungs. So each rung has two of four different kinds of molecules. There are approximately, catch this, three billion rungs on the DNA ladder. That is in the nucleus of every cell. He goes on to say each one of the rungs of the DNA ladder is like a letter on the page of a book. It means something in combination with the other rungs; taken together the rungs are a language that describes various things. One of which, just one of which is the chemical formulas for approximately 21,000 proteins that are

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essential to our body. He went on to say the number of letters in one strand of DNA is roughly the same as the number of letters in 20 Encyclopaedia Britannica's.

Isn't it amazing how all that just evolved? (Ha!) You see my friends not only has the Lord Jesus Christ created you, but he preserves you in ways that are absolutely unfathomable. Moreover, He has redeemed you that He might inhabit you. Do you realize that the triune Godhead lives within each of us who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? So He directs us, He transforms us, He conforms us into His glorious image. Right this very moment you must understand that not only is He preserving every cell in your body and everything in this universe so that it will ultimately accomplish His glorious purposes, but He is also orchestrating everything in your life to accomplish His will.

In Ephesians 1:11 Paul tells us, "we have been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." In Philippians 2:13: "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

So my friend whatever is happening in your life right now, know this, God is in it. He is at work in you in the miracle of divine providence. Paul was profoundly aware of this and that is why he would tell us in Romans 8:28 and we know that God causes *most* things to work together for good. Oh that's not what he says, right? He says: "*All* things work together for good." There is a synergy going on for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. We must understand what we are told in Proverbs 16:9: "the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

Now I want you to notice in light of this, Paul's sensitivity to divine providence. Verse 22: "For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you," what reason? What is the reason he is referring to? Well it's the providence of God in his ministry. Bear in mind that Paul was singularly focused on fulfilling his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. But how did he know where to go, when to go? Where to go next? All those types of things. How long to stay? When to move on. Well, the answer is, by the leading of the Holy Spirit within him and the ordering of events going on outside of him, which many times makes no sense to us as we watch them occur in our life but they do to God.

Think about it, although he wanted to go to Rome, he also knew that an all-wise, ever-present, ever-directing God, as he says here, "hindered" him from doing so. The term hindered in the original language means to cut into or cut out. In fact, we find it used in the context of a military practice whereby the Romans would cut trenches into roads in order to impede the progress of an approaching enemy. It came to be used metaphorically to describe any kind of obstacle or hindrance that blocks the way in our life. Because grammatically this is in what we call the imperfect tense, this verb means that this is a continuation of things in Paul's life. There was an ongoing hindrance here. He doesn't tell

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us what it really looks like, but there was some kind of ongoing hindrance and because it's also in the passive voice it denotes the cause of the hindrance was from the outside.

This is God's providence at work. The Holy Spirit of God was putting up obstacles to impede his progress and thus reroute his direction. We have other examples of this, for example in Acts 16 where we read of his second missionary journey. We read in verse 6, "And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatians region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia," which, by the way, is modern Turkey; "and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go to Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them." So again for some reason the Holy Spirit stopped their travel north. Then later we read that he has a vision in the night, verse 9: "a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" Sometimes we see that God allows Satan to be His unwitting ape, His servant in the affairs of divine providence. For example in I Thessalonians 2: 17, Paul tells the believers: "brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while in person, not in spirit, were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, more than once and yet Satan thwarted us." Certainly anybody that has been in Christian ministry knows that there are times that Satan does this very thing, he usually does it through wicked people often in the church and as their sin begins to surface, it begins to de-rail ministries, we get distracted, things get put on hold, ministries change direction and so forth. But we always bear in mind that somehow God is in it, God is up to something.

I find it intriguing how Paul was so sensitive to the Lord's leading in his life. Now how could he do this? How can we be sensitive to God's providence in our life? Well the answer is simple, and yet, it is profound. We must learn to walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh. Remember Jesus promised in John 16:13 that: "when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth." So when we are walking by the Spirit we are surrendered to the spirit of God as He has revealed Himself through His word. Then we must remain in a constant state of intimate communion with Him through prayer, through obedience.

Certainly Paul was a man of unceasing prayer. Regular, habitual, persistent prayer. That's why he said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that we are to "pray without ceasing." He was always asking others to pray for him. In fact, in verse 25 of that text He says, "brethren pray for us." Now we are not commanded to always be in the act of prayer we should always be in the spirit of it, that's how you maintain sensitivity to God's leading in your life. This is especially true of the Christian minister or missionary. In fact Spurgeon said of the Christian minister, "He has peculiar temptations, special trials, singular difficulties, and remarkable duties; he has to deal with God in awful relationships, and with men in mysterious interests; he therefore needs much more grace than common men, and as he knows this, he is led constantly to cry to the strong for strength and say, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.'"

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Now I want you to notice again, Paul's sensitivity here to the providence of God. In verse 22 we read: "For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you; but now, with no further place for me in these regions"; that is, there was no more places in the region where he was serving where churches hadn't already been planted. He says, "and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain, for I hope to see you in passing and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while, but now I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints."

So what do we see here? Paul has a longing to be with these saints when he goes to Rome. We also read here that he hadn't planned on staying long, that wasn't his commission, just to enjoy fellowship, even though that is precious. He had a commission to go spread the seed of the gospel where no church had been planted. You will recall, he had no desire according to verse 20 to preach the gospel where Christ was already named that he might not build upon another man's foundation.

So he wanted to visit Rome, he wanted to have a little time of fellowship and encourage them, but he also says and "to be helped." The term in the original language means "to be helped on ones way." It can even be translated "escorted." This was consistent with the Christian culture of that day and I might say even today. It was the custom of the early saints that whenever a missionary church planter were to come to their area they would provide for them various provisions, money, supplies and many times an escort to help them reach there destination in some distant land. In fact we read of this in Acts 15:13. Paul and Barnabas were "being sent on their way," that's the same verb, "by the church."

We do that with missionaries here. When they come, we find out what their needs are and we do what we can to help them along their way. So in the providence of God we see that Paul was hindered from going to Rome. God's timing is always perfect. Paul didn't understand all that was going on but he didn't worry about it. In fact, we know that later on he did make it to Rome. After writing this letter he returned to Jerusalem where he was falsely accused by the Jews as we read some this morning in our scripture reading. He was arrested by the Romans. He was held in custody for about two years and he finally appeared to Caesar on the basis of his Roman citizenship and then he was transported to Rome as a prisoner and eventually released for a short period of time and then once again arrested and soon beheaded for his faith.

So we see the first of three marks of a faithful missionary church planter. He's a man that is sensitive to the providence of God in leading his life. I hope this describes you. By the way, if it doesn't, then the Spirit will be grieved even quenched in your life. You will not be led by Him, but you will be led by your own flesh and you will be a miserable person, discontent, ruled by your flesh, always making choices that not only dishonor the Lord but also wreak havoc in your life and in the life of your family.

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But secondly he had an ability to promote unity and this is fascinating. Notice verse 25: "but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints." Again, now, this was the priority based upon what he knew what was the providence of God for various reasons as we are going to see. I want to see you, but now I'm going to go to Jerusalem serving the saints. Verse 26, here's why: "For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."

Now folks, this is really exciting. Let me give you the context. Paul was writing this letter around A.D. 58, which was a time of famine in the land of Palestine. So there were serious needs there for the saints in Jerusalem. We also know that many of the Jews that believed in Jesus came to saving faith during the feast of Pentecost, we read about it in Acts 2. Many of them decided to stay right there in Jerusalem. You will recall according to Acts 2:45 that many began selling their property and possessions and were sharing with them all as anyone might have need. Unfortunately, we have reason to believe that some of them might have gone too far in their giving and tapped into their capital, and once you do that you have no way to replace the income. So you add all of this together along with persecution, men had lost their jobs because of their faith in Christ, families were destitute, many of the bread winners were put in prison, so you have a disaster. There are many needs. By the way, this will always exist for any believer in this fallen world, this satanic realm in which we live. I might also add that this is a profound rebuttal for the "word faith, health and wealth gospel" that is preached by so many charlatans and believed by so many naive people today; that you come to Jesus and He is going to somehow make you healthy, wealthy and wise.

Now, here is what else is remarkable about what's going on here. The saints in Macedonia and Achaia were Gentiles. You see, this is Northern Greece. This would be up in the region of Macedonia, Albania today. But now they are making a contribution to the apostle Paul to give to their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, over 1,000 miles away. By the way, churches in Macedonia would have included the church at Philippi; the church at Thessalonica, the church at Berea; the region of Achaia would have been the church at Corinth.

Now, let's stop and think what has Paul been talking about in chapters 14 and the first part of 15? Disunity in the church because the Jews and the Gentiles are fighting. Fighting over religious nonessentials. Bear in mind many of the Jewish converts that lived in Jerusalem were hard-nosed conservatives that insisted that everybody, especially "you Gentiles"—anybody that comes to Jesus—you've got to be circumcised. Not only that, you've got to avoid certain foods which the law has declared unclean. Well obviously this didn't set well with the Gentiles, so there was all this fighting. There was spiritual condescension and condemnation always just beneath the surface of outward brotherly love.

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So Paul has been talking about how the strong and the weak should function towards one another. You will recall in verse 7 of chapter 15: "you are to accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." Literally you are to welcome those with whom you might differ over these nonessentials with open arms. Bring them you're your friendship and into the realm of your fellowship. What better way to demonstrate this than by giving money to help those in desperate need. Paul saw this as a wonderful opportunity to put love into action. So in verse 26 we read: "For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem." Contribution is that Greek word *koinonia*, you hear it from time to time, it comes from *koinonos* which means "fellow" or "participant." Here it implies the fellowship in sharing with someone or sharing in something. Here it's the financial sharing.

What a dynamic way of demonstrating how Christ has torn down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. And this was all the more extraordinary in that the Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia were not wealthy, they lived in poverty. They were very poor and they also lived in persecution just like their Jewish brethren in Jerusalem. We get a clear sense of this in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 and here is where we read of how Paul urged the Corinthians in Achaia to join with the Macedonians in giving to their impoverished Jewish brethren in Jerusalem. As a footnote, I want to add that these are instructions that provide very detailed information about how we are to handle our finances, how we are to give to the church. If I can say with utmost love for those of you who are poor stewards of the Lord's money, which are stingy, greedy in your giving, you know who you are. You would do well to listen to what the Spirit of God has to say in this text.

2 Corinthians 8:1: "Now brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." So in other words, church at Corinth join in with your Macedonian brothers all of you Gentiles, join in with the Macedonians and let's take up a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

I need to digress for just a moment, there are four central truths regarding financial stewardship that Paul mentions that these early saints understood that many times we don't. Let me give them to you as we look at this text we see that giving is to be:

1. Motivated by God's grace. He speaks of the Grace of God. They gave out of their affliction and their poverty. He says with abundance of joy. He also says they first gave of themselves or gave themselves to the Lord. You see, those who give little, see little of

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their need for grace and in the hardness of their heart, they remain greedy and stingy in their selfish pride.

2. Our giving is to be proportionate. The text there says they gave according to their ability. You see we are not obligated to give some fixed amount. Don't get this confused with tithing. That was an Old Testament under the law, part of the taxation system of a theocracy. There is no such thing as tithing in the New Testament. It's free will giving. We are to give regularly and "as a man may prosper" 1 Corinthians 16:2. Or as we read in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "As he has purposed in his heart."

3. Their giving and ours is to be sacrificial. We read in that text that they gave beyond their ability. Certainly we are to give according to our ability but also in amounts that stretch us into the realm of sacrificing some things in our life for the sake of Christ.

4. Our giving is to be voluntary. Notice they gave of their own accord. Literally means one who chooses his own course of action. We are not to give out of compulsion; we don't give out of manipulation or intimidation, but out of a heart of love for Christ and His people. That's what these early saints did. Paul tells us therefore 2 Corinthians 9:6: "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver."

Beloved given these clear instructions there should not be one single person in this church that doesn't give something on a regular basis, you have no excuse. What a privilege we all have to give out of the abundance that the Lord has lavished upon us.

Think how the gospel goes forth from this church around this community, around the world. I got a letter the other day, an email with a bunch of pictures from our pastor/friend Luciano, I used to be on the radio station there in the Philippines. They can no longer afford that, but he was showing me how he takes his laptop and he puts this pulpit that we find on YouTube and he takes it to little groups of people; and he had pictures of them; and he turns it on, and they sit there, and they hear the same word that you hear every week. That's what God does with faithful giving. Weekly I hear from people all around the world that are being nourished by the word because of your faithfulness.

So, as much as Paul longed to go to Rome and Spain he saw the importance of building unity in the church by taking this Gentile collection over to the Jewish saints that were so impoverished and so impersecuted. Like Paul we need to look for every opportunity to do the same, to demonstrate our love for one another. To, as Paul said in Romans 14:19 "pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." Certainly this was a tangible way for that to occur.

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But notice what else motivated the Gentiles to give to their Jewish brethren verse 27: "Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things." You see, they realized what Jesus told the woman of Sychar in John 4:22 that "salvation is from the Jews." They understood that were it not for Jesus, the promised Messiah, the promised blessing would not have been given to them as well, because they were the wild branches that were grafted into the rich root of covenantal blessing that belonged originally to the Jews. Paul talked about this in Romans 11. They understood that were it not for Jesus, and the Jewish Apostles, and prophets, and teachers, and evangelists, the missionary church planters, they would have never heard the gospel. So they saw that debt, they were indebted to them. Therefore, they were "pleased," it says, to minister to them also in material ways. Don't you know this thrilled the heart of the Apostle Paul? You know ministry is war, and the battle is fierce, and lonely, wearisome, many times it is exhausting. Certainly it is well worth seeing one sinner repent, but oh my, when you see saints loving each other in this way, and sacrificing for one another in such a way, it is a thrill.

Verse 28: "Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain."

So, there was probably a small delegation that would accompany Paul to go to Jerusalem and distribute these gifts. Again, this contribution was a tangible form of the bond of Christian unity and love that transcends the artificial walls of race that men are prone to erect. So Paul as an Apostle and as a Jew he sees his need to put his seal on this fruit of theirs, in other words confirm the sincerity, the genuineness of this love gift to the Jewish brethren. You know, the scripture tells us a little bit, I'll show you in a moment, about their reaction, but there had to have been such tears of joy from those Jewish saints when they received those gifts. Every wise and Godly missionary church planter will see those opportunities that they need to seize upon, to unify other believers and to provide not only physical blessings for them but spiritual blessings as well.

Verse 29 he says: "I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ." This is what he longed for.

Then the third and final mark of a missionary church planter and of any Godly saint is that he will have a devotion to striving with others in prayer. Paul exhorts the saints here in verse 30: "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." Here he pleads with them to something, that frankly, most Christians see little need to do. Ask yourself, how often do you join with other saints, especially your pastor and your elders striving with them in the battle of prayer? To strive together, in the original language, *sunagonizomai*, it's an intensified form of the verb *agonizomai*. We get our English word *agonize* from

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that. It means to struggle; you can just sense that in the sound of the word. It means to strive, to exert great effort. It can literally be used to translate the idea of fighting. In fact it was originally used to describe athletic events where contestants like wrestlers and boxers would struggle, would strive against each other.

So here as in other epistles the apostle Paul is begging the saints to join with him in earnest prayer. Strive with me in this regard, because he knows how powerless he is in his own strength. How often do you join me, do you join others in praying so fervently. If I look at the pathetic attendance on Wednesday nights, I think I have the answer, especially in comparison to the attendance of our potluck dinners. How often do you pray in earnest? I ask you, how often can you honestly say before the Lord that you wrestle with Him for a blessing as Jacob? How often do you fall on your face before Him and cry out for help in your life and in the life of those in your church family, for those that are lost? How often do you wrestle with God daily for yourself?

Isaiah describes it as a taking hold of God. Isaiah 64:7: "There is no one who calls on Thy name, who arouses himself to take hold of Thee." My friend, I would submit to you that if you are lax in your secret devotion to God, in fervent prayer, your Christian life is going to be powerless, and you are going to be brought to shame, and brought to confusion, it's just a matter of time. Sadly, very few people know the rich joy, literally the exhilarating thrill of communing with the Most High in fervent prayer. Not this shallow stuff that we spit out before a meal. Not the meaningless repetitions that often you hear people pray, "Oh Lord we thank you oh Lord for this day oh Lord, because oh Lord You have given so much to us and we pray oh Lord that You will help us oh Lord" and on and on and on. What a betrayal of a life that knows nothing of communing with the Lord their God! I fear that it will always remain one of my deepest regrets and burdens as your pastor that we are so shallow in prayer in this church.

I was struck by one of David Brainerd's entries into his diary. You will recall he was the great missionary to the Native American's in the early 1700's. He said this, " Lord's Day, April 25th, this morning spent about two hours in sacred duties, and was enabled, more than ordinarily, to agonize for immortal souls; though it was early in the morning and the sun scarcely show at all, yet my body was quite wet with sweat." My friends this is the secret to spiritual success and power and love in Christ.

Notice Paul exhorted them to pray for three things:

1. Protection from the Jews. Verse 31: "that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient (obstinate, unteachable, unpersuadable) in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints." He knew full well of the bitterness of the Jews that hated him and sought to kill him.

Marks of a Missionary Church Planter

Romans 15:22-33

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2. He prayed for acceptance from the Jewish brethren, the last part of that verse. "And that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints." You must know that the Gentile church was rapidly growing. The Jewish church so-to-speak couldn't keep pace, and yet they thought that they were the ones, down deep, that God really loved not the Gentile. It was hard for them. With all of the volatility and their animosities and so forth, he knew that there was under the surface this resentment and he is praying that the Jews aren't going to be offended when they receive these gifts from these Gentile brothers.

By the way, his prayers were answered. I told you I would tell you about this. In Acts 21:17 we read: "And when he had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly," and he goes on to say in verse 19: "and after he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God." Isn't that wonderful?

3. Joy in Fellowship. Verse 32: "so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company." You see folks, if things had gone bad in Jerusalem, his eventual visit to those in Rome would be most difficult. Every servant of Christ knows how weary you can get because of rejection, because of physical fatigue, and you also know how precious it is to be able to go visit some saints and experience sweet, refreshing fellowship with them. That's what he wanted them to pray for, never underestimate the power of that. Of course it is always, as he says, "by the will of God." So he concludes this section: "Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen."

I trust that you are at peace with God because you have been justified by faith, you have been declared righteous because you have placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only hope of salvation. I hope, also, as believers your experiencing that subjective peace, that peace of God that surpasses all comprehension that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. A peace that only comes when we trust in Him for everything in our life and relax in His glorious sovereignty to orchestrate our lives in such a way as to grow us into conformity to the image of our precious Savior.

Let's pray together. Father thank you for these glorious truths. There are so many things to ponder here and I pray that by the power of Your Spirit you would help each one of us to take hold of those things that are especially pertinent in our heart, in our life, and then Lord to deal with them with all of our being. To be earnest in prayer over those areas in our life where we are so convicted. Lord, it is so easy for us to justify and rationalize and see the speck in our brother's eye from miles away but not be able to see the log in our own. So Lord I pray for Your grace for each one of us. Finally Lord for those that do not know You as Savior, bring conviction that this day they might repent, and believe, and experience the miracle of the new birth. I pray all of this in the precious name of Jesus, our Savior, and for His sake. Amen.