

Five Marks of a Godly Shepherd

Romans 1:8-15

“Five Marks of a Godly Shepherd” is the title of my discourse to you this morning. It flows from the words of the apostle Paul in Romans chapter one beginning with verse eight. Let me read this text to you. But before I do let me share a thought.

I remember very well the day, the days when each of my children were born. I was there with my precious wife. I saw them come into the world. And I remember very vividly that sense of excitement.

Dads, you know what it is like. It is just overwhelming. You see this child enter the world. You hear their first cries. You watch them being kind of cleaned up and taken over to that little thing that they weigh them on and measure them and they are screaming and carrying on and you are just weeping with your dear wife.

I remember holding my children for the first time, gazing into their eyes as I am wiping tears from mine. It is an indescribable joy. And it is one that is so incredibly precious that it is truly life changing. Your heart is racing. For those of you that haven't experienced this, your heart is just racing. You cannot wait to leave the chamber and to go out and share the good news. And it is so exciting that when you come out your mind is racing and you don't hardly know what to say and you have just got to spit it all out and then finally it just all comes out at once. And then you get on the phone and...

Dear friends, I believe this was a similar feeling that the apostle Paul had in this introduction that we have read earlier, that we have studied. He is so excited. It is as though he could not calm down. I would imagine that Tertius, who you will recall was his secretary writing all of this down probably said to him, “Paul, slow down. Just calm down. I can't write that fast.”

And I would imagine Paul would have said something like, “Yes, but I have got so much to say. I am so excited about what has happened. I am so excited about the gospel.”

In fact, as I read chapter one it is almost as though he spits all of this out and he doesn't even take a breath until verse 32. He is so excited. And this enthusiasm certainly dominates all of his letter.

But here in verses eight through 15 we see him calm down a bit and offer some very personal words to the saints in Rome. And here, dear friends, we have a glimpse into the heart of the apostle Paul. And I believe it is important for a shepherd to share his heart from time to time. And certainly we see that here.

And, as we are going to see, he not only expresses his frustration in not being able to come to them personally, but also he describes very deeply personal things that help us understand the passion of his heart, the purpose of his writing this letter to them.

And so as we examine his words we are going to glean much insight into the heart of the apostle.

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Let me read the text to you beginning at verse eight.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.¹

Here we discover what I would consider five marks of a godly shepherd. Let me give them to you and I will expound upon them. First we are going to see that a godly shepherd will have a Christ centered gratitude for the proclamation of the gospel. Secondly he will have a disciplined prayer life. Thirdly he will have a selfless longing to strengthen the brethren. Fourth he will have a humble desire to learn from others. And, finally, he will have a zeal for the lost without partiality.

These are the marks to which you must hold me accountable and the leadership of this church. But, frankly, they are also the marks that should apply to each one of you regardless of the office that you might hold within a church.

And here we see that Paul's motive for serving Christ was purely for the purpose of the glory of God. In fact, he makes it clear in verse nine with the phrase, "God, whom I serve in my spirit."²

Beloved, how else could he have endured such enormous persecution from both outside as well inside the church? So may I encourage each of you to examine your hearts. What motivates you to serve Christ? Is it self fulfillment? Is it self glorification? If so, these marks are going to seem foreign to you. . Your service will be done in the flesh. They will lack power and they will not be acceptable to the Lord.

But if you are truly motivated to serve God in your spirit, as Paul says, to give yourself as a living sacrifice solely for the glory of God, then you will share Paul's heart and his passion.

Moreover, you will be able to survive the war of ministry. Nay, you will transcend it and

¹ Romans 1:8-15.

² Romans 1:9.

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experience great joy, the great excitement even in the midst of profound adversity from time to time.

So with this in mind, let's examine these five marks closely.

First of all, he has a Christ centered gratitude for gospel proclamation. Notice verse eight.

He says, "First..." In other words, first in importance with respect to the passionate priority of my heart, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."³

Recognizing that it is because of the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ that we can be reconciled to God through faith, he thanks, notice, his God, my God, he says, my personal, my intimate companion.

Friends, without an intimate relationship with God you will never experience this kind of gratitude nor will you be able to persevere in suffering. Think about it. Paul is writing this letter from Corinth and what is happening in Corinth? The Jews are plotting to kill him. He is trying to avoid being murdered. His life is in constant jeopardy. He is completely a collection, we know, to take to the starving saints that are being persecuted in Palestine. And he knows that when he gets to Jerusalem he is going to be thrown in jail probably be executed. And yet his heart is filled with thanksgiving.

It doesn't make sense, does it, unless you have an intimate relationship with God, unless you are living solely for his glory.

How can this possibly be? And the answer, if I can put it this way, could be summarized by saying that he remains lost in the wonder of the exalted gospel of God that has transformed his life, that has saved him by his grace. Nothing else matters in life, just the gospel.

And, beloved, once you take your eyes off the gospel in life, you are going to fall flat on your face. And you are going to end up wallowing in the miserable mire of doubt and despair and discouragement and self pity, especially when life gets hard. But not Paul. He is filled with thanksgiving.

And notice the object of his gratitude. He is thankful for something that is obviously well known around the world and that is that their faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. What a testimony. Would that we had such a testimony.

You know, churches today are known for many things. Their cultural relevance, their state of the art techno worship, their PowerPoint presentations, their musical extravaganzas, their coffee bars, their Disneyworld campuses. And, of course, the most important issue of all you can wear whatever you want. Come worship the transcendent,

³ Romans 1:8.

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glorious God of the universe and feel free to look like an absolute slob. Oh, now that is the church for me.

Churches are known for all kinds of things these days. But how many churches have the reputation that their faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. How often do you hear that on the news?

Faith here refers to perseverance in the midst of persecution. It is referring to the steadfast determination to trust God even in the face of death.

Historically we know that in AD 49, about seven years before Paul would have written this epistle the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. You could read about that in Acts chapter 18 and verse two. You see, he believed that they were following a man by the name of Chrestus which was a variant spelling of Christos in Greek or Christ. And many of the Jews had come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

You will recall even at Pentecost a lot of them were there. They come back over. They come to Christ and what happens? Well, their families blow up. There is all kind of strife. Jews fighting Jews. Well, Claudius finally had enough of it. And so he just thought, you know, I am just going to get rid of all of them.

And then we know that Claudius a little bit later on was poisoned by his wife and he was succeeded by a megalomaniac mad man named Nero. And Nero takes it to the next level. He expands this hatred to include all of Christians. And, of course, we know that it was Nero that tortured and ultimately killed the apostle Paul.

Suetonius, a Roman historian and court official during the reign of the emperor Hadrian wrote this. Quote, "Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition," end quote.

Now you must understand that would have included the saints at Rome that Paul was talking to. But we see that these saints refused to be silenced. Their faith is spreading throughout the world even in the face of death. They had a Spirit empowered strength of character and from them the gospel is expanding all around the world. It is like a wild fire. It is unstoppable.

Persecution tends to do that with the gospel, does it not?

And for this reason Paul is filled with gratitude. He is rejoicing because the power of God, the power of the gospel cannot be silenced.

Dear Christian, does it thrill your soul to see this happening in other places around the world? Do you realize that there is an estimated 1000 people per day like us that are being martyred for the cause of Christ? Sometimes I would encourage you to get outside this middle Tennessee Calvary Bible Church bubble. Get on the internet and read what is happening to saints around the world.

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Some of our very own missionaries risk their lives every day for the gospel. This should cause our hearts to be filled with thanksgiving.

As you think about it, how in the world could their faith be proclaimed throughout the whole world? There is no television. There is no internet. There is no radio. How could it be proclaimed? There is not even printing presses.

Well, it was strictly word of mouth. That kind of news spreads fast by the power of the Holy Spirit. It reminds me of Paul's words to the Thessalonian believers, chapter one verse eight.

He said, "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth."⁴ I love that. "Sounded forth," translates a Greek word meaning to resound, like the sound of a bell. Here it pictures the gospel ringing out from the saints as the sound of a resounding bell.

So Paul tells them, "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth."⁵

There is the same idea.

"So that we have no need to say anything."⁶

I find it interesting that in the New Testament there are really very few exultations for we as believers to tell others about the gospel. It is a curious thing. And the reason is simple, because genuine believers don't need to be told. They cannot help but spread the good news through the Spirit empowered testimony of their life.

You see, for early Christians as soon as you became a convert to Christ your life was on the line. You would probably be shunned by your family. You would probably lose your job. And you certainly could lose your life.

It is for this reason that Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:15 that we need to be able to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.

You see, no one had to tell the early saints to evangelize. If you came to Christ your life would just do that. Their new found faith was so radical that it changed their social and their religious life and everyone quickly saw it. And in the same way the faith of the saints at Rome now resounds throughout the world when Paul wrote this.

Beloved, may I remind you? We are to be salt and light and we need to be so salty and so bright that no one can miss our influence.

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 1:8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

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Does this describe you?

When I was a child we used to sing:

This little light of mine I am going to let it shine.
This little light of mine I am going to let it shine.
Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.

Hide it under a bushel? No. I'm going to let it shine.

That is the idea.

So Paul, we see here, has a Christ centered gratitude for the proclamation of the gospel.

Secondly, he had a disciplined prayer life. This is the second mark of a godly shepherd. Notice verse nine.

“For God, whom I serve...”⁷ It could be translated worship.

“For God, whom I serve in my spirit...”⁸ In other words, in my soul, the very core of my being where I feel, where I think and where I decide,

“For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son,”⁹ he says. is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers.”¹⁰

You see, it is from the core of his being, from this well of passion that he preaches the gospel. And it reminds me of a similar statement that he made in Ephesians chapter six verse six when he declared that he served God, “Not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”¹¹

So in verse nine he says, again, “For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of [my desperate personal needs].”¹²

Obviously he does not say that. He makes mention of you, he says, “always in my prayers.”¹³

⁷ Romans 1:9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Romans 1:9-10.

¹¹ Ephesians 6:6.

¹² Romans 1:9.

¹³ Romans 1:10.

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Two things strike me as I look at this text. His habit of prayer and his topic of prayer. We see that he prays unceasingly and in verse 10 always. And the topic of his prayer is always the spiritual growth of other believers.

You see, again, think about it. He is all about the glory of God not the glory of self. Therefore the theme of his prayers will be that more people will come to Christ and those who come to Christ will grow in Christ and as they grow in Christ and manifest Christ God will get more glory. That is my passion.

Now notice closely. He says, “For God... is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers.”¹⁴

Again, unceasingly. It means incessantly, continually, persistently. That was the nature of his prayers. And he is not praying for himself. He is praying for them.

It is as though he is saying, “I am a slave of the master, the Lord Jesus Christ. I serve him. And I depend upon him for my life, for everything that I have.”

The Lord has said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all of my spiritual needs, all of my physical needs are going to be taken care of.” So I am going to let him be concerned with that. What I am concerned about here is advancing the kingdom, seeking his righteousness so that God can be glorified. That is what drives me.

Now could there possibly have been a more busy man than the apostle Paul? I reflected upon this. Remember, he was a tent maker. In order to not be a financial burden on the nascent church, the fledgling church, many of them were struggling in their own right just to survive amid such persecution. As you read his epistles you see that he is weighed down with deep care and concern for all of the churches. He is concerned that wolves are already devouring the sheep from within. And he is constantly dodging Jewish plots to kill him. Some of them would have been his own friends, perhaps family. And his body would have been in constant pain, healing up from the latest stoning or imprisonment or whatever.

And yet he finds time. No, let me rephrase that. He makes time to pray for other believers.

Beloved, could I ask you to go before the Lord and say, “Lord, I am willing to give you at least five minutes a day, just five minutes a day to pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ in Calvary Bible Church, for our dear missionaries, for other saints around the world.”

Could I ask you to consider that? Beloved, our priorities are really manifested in our prayers, aren't they? And if you have no disciplined prayer life that says a lot about your priorities.

¹⁴ Romans 1:9-10.

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Later, when Paul was an old man you will recall that he is languishing in a Roman prison in conditions that were unspeakable, knowing that he is about to be put to death and yet he writes his letter to the Philippians.

It is interesting. He thanks them for the gift that they gave him. He warns them about false teachers and then he expresses something else that was weighing heavy on his heart. You would have thought it would have been his own condition, right, his own impending death? But, no, he was concerned about Euodia and Syntyche, two prominent women in the church who had some kind of a feud with one another causing dissension within the fellowship.

We must ask ourselves: What is the ratio of time that we spend praying for ourselves verses praying for others? Here was Paul, a stranger to most of the saints in Rome and yet he prays unceasingly and always for them.

No doubt his prayers for them were on the same order as those for the Ephesians.

You will recall in chapter three verse 14 he declares, quote:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.¹⁵

The passion of Paul's heart was for other believers to be strengthened to grow spiritually so that God could receive more glory. He prayed that the Philippian believers would abound in love in Philippians one, quote, "Still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ."¹⁶

Beloved, does this reflect the attitude of your heart? Does this somehow sound like your prayers? Are you praying for spiritual maturity not just for yourself, but for other saints? Paul had a disciplined prayer life. He was constantly pleading for other believers. Remember, he encouraged the saints in Thessalonica, chapter one beginning in verse 11. Here is what he said. Quote, "We pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you."¹⁷

¹⁵ Ephesians 3:14-19.

¹⁶ Philippians 1:9-10.

¹⁷ 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

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There it is.

He went on to say, “And you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

And to the believers at Colosse in Colossians chapter one beginning at verse nine he says:

We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.¹⁹

Beloved, this is the stuff of a godly shepherd. This is the stuff of every godly saint who longs to see God glorified.

But notice also Paul prayed that he might be used as an instrument of righteousness on their behalf. This is the third mark of a godly shepherd. He is not only a Christ... has a Christ centered gratitude for the gospel proclamation and a disciplined prayer life, but, thirdly, a selfless longing to strengthen the brethren.

Verse 10.

“Always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.”²⁰

Verse 11.

“For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established.”²¹

Literally that you may be strengthened, that you will be made firm, that you will become more like Christ.

This was why he wanted to be with them. But the Lord had not yet allowed it to happen.

But notice in verse 11 he says, “For I long to see you.”²²

And in verse 13 he says, “Often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far).”²³

¹⁸ 2 Thessalonians 1:12.

¹⁹ Colossians 1:9-11.

²⁰ Romans 1:10.

²¹ Romans 1:11.

²² Ibid.

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So what do you do? You pray. You pray persistently all the while being humbly submissive to the will of God without complaint.

As I think about the ministry of the apostle Paul I find myself smiling at times because if you think about it, he had no grandiose ministry scheme to win the world for Christ. There was no master plan, shall we say. You don't read about any big fund raisers or any massive evangelistic crusades. Rather, he is just salt and light wherever he goes, just salt and light wherever God leads.

If it was a crowd or if it was a small group or if it was a single person, if it was a synagogue or a street corner or wherever he was, he was always ready to tell about the Savior or to somehow demonstrate his love for him in some unique way.

Beloved, God will always steer you where he wants you to go and where he wants you to go. You just need to be ready, constantly ready submitting to him. He is in control.

Back to verse 11.

He says, "I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established."²⁴

Again, this is the heart of a true shepherd. He is always... he is always giving. He is always nurturing. He is always strengthening. You see, he has no personal agenda. There is no desire here to advance himself. You notice here in this letter as he writes to these people, he doesn't spend any time tooting his own horn. You all know that phrase, don't you? Bragging about yourself. Bragging about your ministry achievements, hoping that people will somehow be impressed with who you are and what you have done.

But rather the longing of his heart and the dominant theme of his persistent prayers is to simply be able to come so that he could impart some spiritual gift to them. And this is referring to just any kind of spiritual blessing that the Holy Spirit would choose to give them through his giftedness as a servant.

You see, his passion was to do all that he could by the power of the Spirit to help them become more like Christ, to enjoy all of the blessings that were theirs because of God's grace. Oh, that every Sunday school teacher, that every youth pastor, that every missionary, that every person in the church would have such a shepherd's heart.

I recall spending some time a number of years ago with an elderly missionary couple in the remote mountains of British Columbia. They had worked with the native Indians there for almost 40 years when I talked with them. And they only had a handful of converts. And I remember asking them.

²³ Romans 1:13.

²⁴ Romans 1:11.

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“Do you ever get discouraged because there are so few that have come to Christ over all these years?”

And I remember parts of what they said. This certainly isn't a direct quote. It is a paraphrase, but it stuck with me all these years. I remember one phrase. The dear man said to me, “Occasionally we battle that arrow of the devil. But then we will quickly grab the shield of faith based on Ephesians six.” And he went on to say, “We will remember that our responsibility to the Lord is to be faithful in shepherding the little flock that he has given us, however few, however many.” He went on to talk about how that when they saw the needs of the people that God had placed in their life they realized that this was their calling to sacrifice their lives that these people might be strengthened in the faith. And he talked about, and the wife did as well, how that they felt that they had a special calling to minister to these people. Sure they prayed for more converts, but this was their calling.

And in that they found profound joy, a sense of purpose and fulfillment because ultimately they knew that this was how God had determined by his sweet providence to glorify himself in that place for that time. That is the idea.

I remember them talking about how we do the sowing and we trust God for the harvest. We pray that he will, but until that happens we have more than enough to do dealing with these few brothers and sisters in Christ.

Well, like Paul they had a selfless longing to strengthen the brethren.

But, fourthly, we see that Paul had a humble desire to learn from others. This is fascinating to me. You see, not only does he want to help the saints become more established in their faith, but he understands that by strengthening them he, too, is going to be strengthened. He, too, is going to be encouraged.

Verse 12.

“That is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.”²⁵

The word “encouraged” is *sumparakaleo* (soom-par-ak-al-eh'-o) in the original language. It means to exhort at the same time together. It is the idea of gaining strength from one another even comforting, finding comfort together with one another.

And if you look at verse 12 notice the little phrase, “that is.” This is a way of him modifying his previous statement. In other words, he is saying to them, “Look, I don't want to just exalt myself here in any way and think that when I come to you to visit you that it is going to be a one way street, that it is just me giving to you. I realize that you also have much to give to me.”

²⁵ Romans 1:12.

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He wants them to know that they can learn from him as well as he from them. He greatly desired their input into his life.

But think about this. This is the most brilliant theologian in the history of the world and he is longing to be encouraged, exhorted, comforted, strengthened, et cetera, by the simple faith of novice believers. That is an interesting thought.

Why? Because he has a humble desire to learn from other believers whom God has gifted and whom God can use to speak to his life. Now that is humility, isn't it?

You know, there is no greater enemy to spiritual growth than pride and an unteachable spirit. There is no greater enemy. We tend to think we know it all, that no one really has anything to offer us. We tend to get, as we say, set in our ways. We tend to like our own little group and we resent diversity. We prefer to interact with our own little group.

I would ask you—and I ask this in kindness—those of us who have walked with the Lord for years how many of us really spend one on one time interacting with our youth about spiritual matters? How often does that happen? Do we tend to think—though we would never admit it—that God could really never use them to minister to us? That somehow we are kind of above all of that. Yet you realize that was not the heart of the apostle Paul. I am not saying that the saints in Rome were all young. There would have been those that were young. But I think you get the idea.

Beloved, we all struggle with pride. Though we tend to conceal it with our church smiles. We have very subtle ways of kind of parading our halos so everybody can see it. We have this public persona of humility. But, you know, real humility will manifest itself in willingness to interact on a spiritual level with other believers, all believers, even believers that we might not know all that well. And what you will find... I find this all the time, even talking with a new Christian. It is amazing how I can talk with a new believer and the Spirit of God will use something they have said to minister to my heart and to teach me something.

Don't miss out on that opportunity. Don't sell yourself short. Not only can you minister to them, but they can minister to you. This was Paul's heart, a man of deep humility, the esteemed apostle desiring to be encouraged, even exhorted together by the faith of these dear saints in Rome.

You see, Paul understood, once again, the blessings to be gained by learning from others regardless of their level of maturity, regardless of their theological acumen.

He understood that every believer has been supernaturally endowed with a spiritual gift to serve those within the body and he is a part of the body. And he wants to take the heart of that. He wants to benefit from that.

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Now sometimes in the midst of this kind of give and take, in the midst of this kind of interaction there will be, perhaps, a gentle rebuke. I have experienced that. If you have been around me long you have needed to gently rebuke me, sometimes strongly. Sometimes I have gently rebuked you and sometimes strongly. In fact, there may be some coming. You never know. Whenever iron sharpens iron there will always be a few sparks that fly.

But there is such enormous benefit, dear friends, in interacting with other saints in spiritual matters if you have a teachable spirit, if you have a humble desire to learn from others.

Remember, Paul's admonition to the older and younger men, 1 Peter five to clothe themselves with humility toward one another. For God is opposed to what? He is opposed to the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

This will always be a mark of a godly shepherd. Great blessings await us, dear friends, when we seek to be encouraged and exhorted and strengthened by one another. And the fifth and final mark of a godly shepherd that emerges from this text is a zeal for the lost without partiality.

Notice verse 13.

He says, "And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles."²⁶

So here Paul makes it clear to them how intensely was his desire to come to them, although the providence of God had prevented it thus far. But here we see yet another reason that motivated him. Not only does he want to impart some spiritual gift to them that they might be further established in the faith for the glory of God and that he also might be encouraged by them, but here he adds, "in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also."²⁷

Now in this context fruit refers to new converts. The bearing of fruit on the vine of his life being other people who come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Spiritual fruit is often pictured as new believers. We read, for example, in Romans 16 verse five Paul described Epaenetus as being the first convert, literally the first fruit to Christ in or from Asia.

You see Jesus made it clear that the motivating core of all gospel ministry is to bear spiritual fruit, to lead other people to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and to see them grow in that grace and in that knowledge.

²⁶ Romans 1:13.

²⁷ Ibid.

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Jesus said in John 15 verse 16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain,”²⁸ speaking to the apostles.

Now in the New Testament this fruit will also include a godly character and the conduct that will flow out of that. We read that, for example in Galatians five, the fruits of the Spirit.

It will also include any kind of righteous behavior. In fact, Paul spoke in Philippians 1:11 of the, quote, “fruit of righteousness.” But it is also going to include and, especially in this context, leading others to a saving knowledge of Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is the passion of his heart.

I ask you. Is this the passion of your heart? Is this something that drives you? If so, how are you serving Christ to see this accomplished.

Notice in verse 13. He wants to “obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.”²⁹

And then verse 14 he says, “I am under obligation.”³⁰

Interesting. According to Acts nine and verse 15 God, we know, had specifically called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. The text goes on to say, “kings and the sons of Israel.”³¹

And so to that extent he is under obligation. But, more importantly, he is fully aware of how God had mercifully snatched him from the flames of hell by confronting him with the truth of his sin and the glory of the Savior. And that drives him now to be under obligation to preach the same thing to other people who unless they repent, unless they believe in Christ they will perish in their sins.

This should be the attitude of every believer.

My friends, if you have no compassion for the lost, you are in need of serious self examination and repentance.

An avowed and very vocal Atheist named Penn Gillette described his encounter with a very polite and impressive Christian gentleman that shared the gospel with him and here is what he said. Quote, “I have always said, you know, that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe that there is a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting into eternal life or whatever, and you really think that, well, it is not really worth telling others this because it would be socially

²⁸ John 15:16.

²⁹ Romans 1:13.

³⁰ Romans 1:14.

³¹ Acts 9:15.

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awkward.” He goes on to say, “How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you and you didn’t believe it and that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I go to tackle you. This is far more important than that,” end quote.

That is powerful, isn’t it?

But will you notice that Paul is not that way. He was not ashamed of the gospel. Remember over in verse 16 he is going to say, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”³²

But, finally, will you notice that Paul’s zeal for evangelism was not just towards one specific people group, one group that he preferred. It was to all men without partiality.

He said in verse 14, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.”³³

You must understand that the Greeks of that day considered themselves as the most sophisticated people in all the world. They were the most highly educated, the most highly cultured. They believed that they spoke the language of the gods. They believed that they understood the divine philosophies that would cause them to be elevated to divinity themselves. These were what Paul is calling the wise.

And in contrast to that were the barbarians. They were all of the rest. These were the uncouth, uneducated, unsophisticated people in the world. In fact, barbarians is an onomatopoeiac word meaning it sounds like what it means.

You see, the term was rooted in the repetition of the sound “bar.” The Greeks would make fun of people of other languages by saying that they just talked, “Bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar.” And out of that came barbarians.

And so Paul is saying here that he is committed both to... he is under obligation here to the Greeks as well as to the barbarians, to the wise and... what the Greeks would have considered the foolish.

To put it in a different way, the apostle Paul was committed to the arrogant Harvard elites as well as all of the rest of us.

So verse 15 he says, “ Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”³⁴

³² Romans 1:16.

³³ Romans 1:14.

³⁴ Romans 1:15.

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Romans 1:8-15

I have the same compassion for all men, for the most arrogant, for the most educated, the most cultured, the most sophisticated as well as the uneducated man in the bush of Sudan.

Five marks of a godly shepherd: a Christ centered gratitude for gospel proclamation, a disciplined prayer life, a selfless longing to strengthen the brethren, a humble desire to learn from others and, finally, a zeal for the lost without partiality. May the Holy Spirit of God shape our lives accordingly.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths. Cause us to be changed by them for your glory and for our joy. And, Lord, for anyone who does not know you as Savior, oh God, give them no rest upon their pillow until they cry out for saving grace. We ask this in the precious name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.

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