

TAKE SERIOUSLY THE DUTIES GOD GIVES
(SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2013)

Scripture reading – Isaiah 66; Rom. 15:22-23

INTRODUCTION

When we were studying the book of Matthew, I made the application from the account of John the Baptist in chapter 3, that the strong message John proclaimed is a good reminder that the issues related to eternal life and death are too serious for you to try to figure out on your own. There is no room for error when it comes to the eternal wellbeing of your soul and body.

I also pointed out that it should be of encouragement that the message of the gospel needs no updating nearly 2000 years later. Many things have obviously changed culturally, technologically, and in other ways, but what remains without change is the only way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and His perfect and finished work.

What also has not changed is the duty that each member of Christ's church and a particular local church has been given. The age of apostles and prophets is past because the foundation has already been laid. But the duties and joys of being part of Christ's church and a local church remain.

As we continue to look at the final part of Paul's letter to the Romans we see how Paul even in this part of this letter reminds us of the serious responsibilities and the great blessings God gives to His people.

The gospel message needs no updating. The vital importance of being part of a local church for the advancement and support of the gospel message has not changed either.

Take seriously the joys and duties of being part of Christ's church and a local church.

We will look at Romans 15:22-33 in three parts – vv. 22-24, 25-29, and 30-33.

1) HINDRANCES MUST NOT STOP OUR WORK, VV. 22-24

Rom. 15:22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.

23 But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, **24** whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For

I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while.

Look at some of the blessings mentioned in our text today - enjoyment of friendship and company, meaningful service, fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ, love of the Spirit, refreshment, peace.

These blessings do not mean the absence of struggle and obstacles. Think of what Jesus Christ endured. Can you think of a single person in Scripture or in history who accomplished much for the sake of Christ without any difficulty, pain, or suffering? I can't think of anyone.

The more you attempt for the cause of Christ, the greater the obstacles you will face.

Remember 2 Timothy 3:12?

2Tim. 3:12 Yes, and **all who desire** to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Paul speaks of being hindered from traveling to Rome. In 1 Thess. 2:18, Paul writes of being hindered by Satan.

Here that which hindered Paul is not explicitly stated other than the difficult ministry he had in Ephesus.

Paul spent about three years in Ephesus. Why did he spend so much time there? I don't think it was because he like to live near the beautiful Mediterranean Sea or he especially like the food they served in Ephesus. Paul spent this much time in Ephesus because the work was difficult. He was hindered from moving to new areas of service.

1 Cor. 15:32a gives background here.

1Cor. 15:32a If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me?

Paul was finally able to continue his ministry in other regions. Last week we noted Paul's ministry in the province of Illyricum, which is mentioned only here in Romans 15.

Paul wrote the book of Romans from the city of Corinth. His work in this region was now finished. He writes interestingly in verse 23, "no longer having a place in these parts."

He speaks also in verse 23 of his great desire over many years to visit the church in Rome.

There is in Paul the beautiful demonstration of love for others, even those that he never had met. Paul loved people. The end of 1 Cor. 13 declares, “But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Paul was a great missionary because God used him in great ways. It is not simply that we try to copy the exact methods and strategies of Paul and think we will accomplish what he did. But I think we can say that one of the key aspects of Paul’s ministry was his true love for those he both served directly and others that he never even knew personally.

Love is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. It is not just something we run across. It is God’s gracious gift. But do you pray that God would strengthen your love for Him and for others? Do you see the essential importance of love as defined by God’s Word if you are going to be useful for Christ?

We see from verse 24 and also verse 28 that Paul wanted to visit Rome but not in order to establish a kingdom in Rome but in part so that he could carry the gospel even further to the west.

Paul had his sights set for Spain.

Why Spain? Spain was an area where likely no one had already been preaching.

Another possible reason is that Spain and in particular the city of Gades in Spain represented the ends of the earth in Greek and Hebrew thought. The city of Tarshish was also considered to be at the ends of the earth.

We don't know for certain whether Paul made it to Spain. There is evidence from *1 Clement* to suggest he did. Eckhard Schnabel in his detailed work on Christian Mission believes the evidence is reasonable that Paul did eventually make his way to Spain, though others are not as certain.¹

In verse 24 Paul speaks of his desire to be with the believers in Rome, enjoying their company, and also being helped on his way.

There is another parallel here with Romans 1.

Rom. 1:15 So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

¹ Schnabel, 1271-1272. The editor of John Calvin’s commentary on Romans did not believe the evidence was sufficient to believe Paul made it to Spain.

Here Paul emphasizes not his desire to preach in Rome as to be with them in preparation for opportunity in Spain. There is no contradiction here of course, but we might be correct in seeing a different emphasis here on the help that those in Rome will give to him now that Paul is bringing this letter to a close.²

The verb used in verse 24, to be helped, refers to all the different aspects of helping someone to make a journey – food, money, arranging means of travel, and arranging for travel companions.³

This portion of God’s Word is again a reminder of the real partnership we also enjoy with those that we support as missionaries of this local church. Times have changed, but many aspects remain the same. There are practical needs to meet and ways that you can help.

We will come back to this later in the message, but I would like to again encourage everyone in this church to realize that the reason we support missionaries is because we believe this is part of the pattern Jesus Christ established and that the apostles followed.

2. THE THEOLOGY AND DUTY OF GIVING, vv. 25-29

Rom. 15:25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. **26** For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. **27** It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. **28** Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. **29** But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

What was Paul’s main calling or duty as an apostle? It was to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ especially in areas where Christ was never preached.

Was this the only thing Paul did? No.

Gal. 2:9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of

² Moo, 901.

³ BDAG, s.v. “προπέμπω,” 873.

fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. **10** *They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

Before Paul was to visit Rome, he had to complete an important mission to Jerusalem, his fourth visit since his conversion, so that he could minister to the saints in Jerusalem.

This visit is an important theme in Paul's letters written around this time.

1Cor. 16:3 And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

2Cor. 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: **2** that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. **3** For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing,

In verse 26, Paul speaks of churches in two different provinces that had freely given to help some of the needy believers in Jerusalem.

Macedonia included churches in Philippi and Berea. The church in Corinth was part of the province of Achaia.

Observe from verse 26 and 27 the expression, "it pleased those/them."

Here is the beautiful aspect of Christian giving. We are to give freely because we desire to give.

Without speaking in a contradictory way, Paul says that although they freely gave, they also were fulfilling a debt or obligation they had to those in Jerusalem.

Look again at the language in verse 27. If Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, they are obligated to minister to them in material things.

Those of the nations were blessed by the spiritual blessings coming from Jerusalem. It was only right then they sought to give help to poor believers in Jerusalem.

How different is this mentality from the socialism and redistribution ideas present today.

Jewish believers in Jerusalem faced a number of difficulties. Jerusalem was not an easy place for these believers. This was a great time of testing for them. The Jewish war was to start in about 10 years. Other aspects made this a very challenging time.

We should not forget those faithful Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were an important beginning to the spread of the gospel.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

We see also again the important place for sacrificial giving, even to help those you do not know. This is God's method for helping those with needs rather than government bureaucratic schemes.

Paul's journey to Jerusalem was theologically and practically important. He uses language which speaks of this importance.

Look at verse 28 – performed or completed this and have sealed to them this fruit.

Paul was not just going to go to Jerusalem with a wad of cash and hand it out, but make sure that the believers in Jerusalem also understood the significance of the gift and Paul's mission.⁴

After completing this mission, Paul was planning to travel to Spain by way of Rome as we have already noted.

Look again at verse 29. This passage speaks both of your duty and the joys God gives to you.

When Paul visited Rome he would come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.⁵

Some suggest this phrase speaks of Paul's ministering to the Roman Christians and then the Roman Christians helping Paul.⁶ Others suggest that Paul's successful completion of his visit to Jerusalem will witness to the blessing that Jesus Christ has given to His ministry. Paul will visit Rome with full approval from His master of his work to those of the nations.⁷

Either way I think this verse emphasizes that when God's people are rightfully focused on their duty and calling, that this is the place of great blessing.

What is there in the ordinary pursuits of life that can compare with the blessing that is found when we are serious about our service for Jesus Christ?

⁴ Moo, 907.

⁵ Some versions do not have the word gospel. They read, “fullness of the blessing of Christ.”

⁶ Moo, 907.

⁷ Witherington, 366.

3. YOU ARE CALLED TO STRUGGLE IN PRAYER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL, vv. 30-33.

Rom. 15:30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, **31** that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, **32** that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. **33** Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.

Paul gives a very strong challenge to pray - I beg you/plead with you. Take this very seriously.

Here we see another important aspect of the duty and also joy of being part of Christ's church and a local church – the duty and joy of prayer.

Paul gives a strong pleading because what he requests believers in Rome to do is not something easy.

He calls for them to struggle or strive in prayer. This verb is a call for another person to fight with you. Here the idea is that together we make our plea before God.⁸

Does your prayer life ever fall into the category of *striving*? We are to strive together in prayer to God the Father.

The reason believers fail in their duty to pray is because it is difficult to pray in the way that we are commanded.

We must be careful not to start glorifying man-centered methods of prayer. Holiness is not found in how long you pray. There is also the danger of feeling good about ourselves based on how much time we spend in prayer. Satan loves both prayerlessness and pride in prayer. You must seek to avoid both dangers.

What is described here is intentional, serious prayer for the specific needs that Paul here describes.

There are three things Paul requests.

- 1) that he will be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe
- 2) that his service in Jerusalem would be acceptable to the saints, the Jewish believers

⁸ BDAG, s.v. “συναγωνίζομαι,” 964.

3) that he will be able to travel to Rome with joy according to God's will and be refreshed with the church in Rome

Paul was well aware of the twofold difficulty of his journey to Jerusalem. It was dangerous and unfortunately there were many who twisted or misunderstood Paul's message of grace.

It was truly an awesome duty for Paul, a former Pharisee, one who had been trained in Jerusalem, to return to the city he knew so well.

Consider these three requests of Paul. Were they answered? Yes, but in a way we might call God's difficult providence.

Acts 21 records this important visit. Verse 17 says that the brethren received Paul and his companions gladly. There was true joy in hearing about Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. We also see that there was some misunderstanding concerning Paul's message and so he was advised to show that he still was a faithful Jew in terms of the law.

The purification procedure Paul followed in the temple led to a false accusation brought against Paul which led to an uproar. Paul nearly was killed by a mob of unbelieving Jews in the temple courts. He was then delivered as he requested but only by then being locked up by the Romans which lasted for two years. Paul did eventually make his way to Rome with true joy but he arrived in chains.

We pray not because we know the outcome. We pray because we have been adopted in God's family and so we cry out to our Heavenly Father.

We pray for others as the language of verse 30 shows through the Lord Jesus Christ and because we have been given a love for others through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Do you see another beautiful reference to the Triune nature and work of the one true God?

The chapter ends with a short but still very significant benediction.

Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Here in this blessing is a summary of all that we enjoy because of what Christ has done. We enjoy peace with God and also we enjoy the very presence of the God of peace. And it is this peace that should be demonstrated in the many ways we are called to treat each other.

Is this peace reflected in your thoughts, words, and actions?

CONCLUSION:

Last week I focused on the topic of calling. God gives to each believer spiritual gifts and a way that those gifts are to be used. Our text for today is similar in that it speaks to you of the duty and privilege of being part of a local church.

God's kingdom is greater than just that which is done by local churches. But local churches are called to play a vital, a central role in the work of Christ's kingdom.

Every believer is to be part of a local church - because in so doing you can most participate in the joys and duties that God gives.

A few final challenges:

- Membership
- Missions
- Prayer
- Giving
- Goal is to press the crown rights of Jesus Christ. How can we give anything less than our best?

Closing Hymn: 384

BENEDICTION – EPH. 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.