

March 7, 2021

# How the Gospel Changes Our view of church

Romans 1 8-15

The gospel of Jesus Christ changes how believers relate to church.

I suspect this is the testimony of many who are hearing my voice this morning. Before Jesus saved you and called you to himself by the gospel, you had little interest in church. This is even true of many who have grown up in the church. As soon as you came of age, you found yourself questioning the reason your parents took you to church. It's also true if people who have never darkened the door of a local church

I suspect you are all acutely aware that the culture of our country is growing less and less tolerant of the church, the doctrines to which she clings, and the righteous (biblical) standards by which she strives to live. These have become anathema to the world in which we live. That which used to be universally rejected as evil is now the new morality. And that which throughout history has been viewed as moral, right and good, is now considered wicked and immoral.

Today, in the hallowed halls of our government, new legislation is being created that will establish more of the new morality as the law of the land. And as their agenda gains traction, the church and its leaders will increasingly become the targets of censorship, financial penalties, and even arrest.

Witness what has recently happened to our brother, James Coates, in Alberta Canada. For not cancelling church in the latter days of the pandemic, he's been arrested and thrown in jail.

His church, and other churches in the U.S. have endured heavy fines for gathering and worshipping together contrary to the edicts of their respective health department restrictions.

All of this is contrary to clear constitutional mandates in both countries. Nevertheless, we should not be surprised by such hostility from the world. Jesus said this would happen, and I suspect this is just the beginning of what is to come as world leaders persist in legislating more and more pressure on the church to conform to the new social ethics as it relates to freedom of worship, gender fluidity, racial and sexual equality, environmental protections and a host of other issues.

All of this is going to put pressure on professing Christians relative to their relationship with the church. And frankly, I believe this is going to have a purifying effect on the church. People who have been attending church for decades will be unwilling to suffer for the superficial experiences their man-centered churches have always served. And many who attend solid, biblical churches will discover that their commitment to Christ is something they are unwilling to

suffer for. For the apostle Paul, however, there was never any question about whether to persist in his devotion to the church. It didn't matter that it was illegal to meet in certain cities. It didn't matter when he was threatened with bodily harm. It didn't matter even when those threats were backed up with severe floggings, being beaten with rods, or even being stoned and left for dead. Faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ created in him an unwavering devotion to the church for which Christ died.

Friends, I want you to understand that Paul loved the church. He sacrificed for the church. He supported the church. He was the primary instrument by which churches were planted and multiplied in Asia-Minor. While many modern Christians justify NOT gathering with the Lord's people for superficial reasons such as weather, work, or leisure, Paul would happily travel thousands of miles by boat and on foot to fellowship and worship with other believers who gather as the church.

This is clearly born out in the text before us this morning. Remember, Paul didn't grow up in the church. He attempted to destroy the church. But when he met Jesus on the Damascus Rd. his heart was radically changed. That which he once viewed as evil now became for him, man's greatest good. Now, he NOT only love Christ, but he also loved the Bride of Christ – the church.

This is the common experience of new believers. Whereas once they were indifferent (or even hostile) to the church, now they love her. They love God's people and are devoted to gathering with them whenever the church meets. The Gospel that creates a deep love for Jesus also creates devotion to His church. And that brings us to the question of the morning:

How should a believer think about and relate to their local church?

In the passage before us this morning, Paul teaches by example how a Christian should relate to his church. Specifically, we should relate to our church...

I. Thankfully

II. Prayerfully

III. Proactively

IV. Fruitfully

V. Evangelistically

With that in mind, please join me in turning in your Bible to Romans chapter 1, and follow along as I read vv. 8-15

We have much to think about this morning, so let's get started. First of all, Paul teaches us to relate to our local church...

## I. Thankfully: (8)

1. In v. 8, Paul declares, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you." Its somewhat humorous to note that Paul's first word is "First." That would imply that there will be a 2<sup>nd</sup>,

right? Perhaps in his excitement over what he has to say to the romans he forgot all about his 2<sup>nd</sup> point (I feel his pain). On the other hand, “First” may simply mean that what he is about to say is important.

2. Now we need to remember that Paul is writing a letter to the believers in Rome, and the most urgent thing on his mind is how thankful he is for them. “I thank My God through Jesus Christ for all of you.” These must have been sweet words to their ears. There they were far, far away from Jerusalem and the other churches, but Paul knew about them. In fact, as we will see in chapter 16, he knew a lot of them by name.

3. Paul was such an encourager! He was famous for building people up. In nearly every letter he wrote he made it a point to give thanks for specific people in their respective churches. In Philippians he highlighted the faithfulness of Timothy & Epaphroditus. In his letter to Colossae it was Epaphras and Onesimus. The only exception is his letter to the Galatians, because when he wrote that letter, he was mad! But I’ll let you study that out on your own.

4. Normally, the reason Paul gave thanks to the Lord for people was because of their faithfulness to Christ and His church. That is certainly the case here. He writes, “I thank MY God through Christ Jesus for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.”

5. Now this is interesting. Paul says the reason he gives thanks to God for them is because their Faith is proclaimed (i.e it has become well known) throughout the whole world.

- A. I take this to mean that all the other churches were talking about it.
- B. It makes me wonder what happened?
- C. I only takes a little sanctified imagination to fill in the gap here. After all, this church was planted right in the heart of the pagan empire of Rome, and at the time Nero was on the throne as Emperor.
- D. Paul wrote this letter in 57 AD, just 7 years before much of Rome was burned down and Nero made Christians the scapegoat resulting in sever persecutions. So we might say that Paul wrote to the Romans in pre-persecution days.
- E. Nevertheless, I can’t help but think that living as Christians in Rome brought about significant societal pressure fraught with all kinds of temptations and fears. Yet, even under those pressures, the brothers and sisters in the Roman church had remained faithful. And all the other churches heard about it.
- F. Frankly, it reminds me of Grace Community Church in California which has remained faithful to the Lord despite the despotic pressures the city of Los Angeles foists upon them every week. Like the church in Rome, their faith is being proclaimed, literally, all over the world.

6. But notice here that Paul is NOT thanking the members of that church or its pastors for their faithfulness. Rather, he thanks God for their faithfulness. Jesus said He is building his church and he is. Therefore, he gets all the glory.

6. So the first way a Christian should relate to his church is Thankfully. Do you thank God for your church? Why? You should come to small group this week prepared to share your thoughts. Second, Christians should relate to their church

## II. Prayerfully (9-10)

Read v. 9-10

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you <sup>10</sup> always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

1. Note the phrase, "God is my witness." Paul uses that phrase in his writings to emphasize the importance of what he is about to say.<sup>1</sup> In this case, he is actually calling upon God to stand as witness to the truthfulness of what he is about to write. But before we consider the important thing Paul will say, he first wants us to consider who this God is. Who is this God who stands as witness behind what Paul will write to the church of Rome? Paul identifies him here:

- A. He is (9) "the God Whom I serve with my spirit." The word "serve" here is often translated "Worship." it is appropriate to think of this as worshipful service. It is service that is rendered to God from the heart, which is the only kind of service that is acceptable to God.
- B. But notice, too, that this service (Paul's ministry as an apostle) is "in the gospel of His Son." In other words, everything God wants Paul to say as an apostle falls within the sphere of the "Gospel of His Son."
- C. Now, the NASB inserts the phrase "the preaching of" the gospel, but the word "Preaching" is not in the original. To be sure, preaching was a ministry Paul often emphasized, but the worshipful service that he was called to perform would have included many things.
- D. Both M.L.J and William Hendricksen argue that Paul is speaking of all forms of ministry that fall under the broader Gospel umbrella.<sup>2</sup> For example, teaching sound doctrine and refuting error. All his practical teaching on marriage, the duties of parents to their children, and children to their parents. How to relate to the world and its government. How to address personal sin, how to ask for and grant forgiveness as an expression of the gospel. The duties and qualifications of church leaders. The list goes on and on.
- E. In fact, Martun L.J. said that "Every particle of the riches of His grace are a part of the Gospel of His Son. It is the good news of the Son of God and what he came into the world to do. Lloyd-Jones says, "Anything I can get from Christ is part of the good news." In fact, EVERYTHING Paul teaches us in Romans is "In the Gospel of His Son." Everything Paul teaches is owing to a derived from the Gospel of God's Son."

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Moo, 26

<sup>2</sup> Martin Lloyd-jones,

- F. And this is what Romans is about. It's all about the Gospel of God's Son: how it creates saving faith in the heart of sinners and how that faith works its way into every aspect of our being, sanctifying and transforming us into the image of the Son who is In Himself the personification of the Gospel.
- G. Drill into the Bible's teaching on any subject and you will soon find yourself face-to face with Jesus, God's son.
- H. Well, that was a wonderful, inspired parentheses, but now we need to get back to what Paul intends to tell the Romans.

2. What can be so important for Paul to say that he would call God to serve as witness to the veracity of his words? Well, first of all, he wants them to know that he Prays for them constantly. In fact, he prays "without ceasing."

- A. Generally speaking, every time he thinks of them he prays for them.
  - 1) Can you imagine how it would effect our church if every time a member of our body comes to mind we actually redirect our thoughts to pray for them? This is what Paul did.
  - 2) James wrote, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."
  - 3) Do you pray for other members of our church when they come to mind?

B. Second, and more specifically, Paul prays that God would allow Him to one day personally visit and get to know the members of the church in Rome. He writes,

"Always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you."

3. Now, someone may ask, "How does Paul's request to see them again rise to the level of calling God as witness? Well, I think the point of it all is that he truly loved the people he knew in that church body and he didn't want them to think that he was dodging or avoiding them.

4. You see, Paul was writing this letter from Corinth which was 750 miles from Rome. But before he could even begin his journey to Rome, he had to take the relief money he had been collecting to the suffering brothers in Jerusalem. Corinth is over 1,000 miles from Jerusalem if you take the short route, and its in the opposite direction from Rome. Then, from Jerusalem it's another 1400 miles from Jerusalem back to Rome. All of that to say, it was going to be a year (probably more) before he could ever hope to see those dear brothers and sisters.

5. Were there potential risks involved in Paul's plan to visit that church? Were their hardships he would endure? Could he be killed in the process? Yes! Yes! And Yes! But for the sake of the Gospel of God's Son he didn't let the risks hinder him. And besides that, Paul says (11) "For I long to see you."

6. Acts tells us that when he arrived in Jerusalem he was falsely accuse, beaten and arrested. It was then that the Lord told him he would he would go to Rome to testify about Jesus. But he

didn't travel there on foot. No, he went by sea as a prisoner where he, no doubt, finally got to meet with the dear brothers and sisters from the church in Rome, though Paul was in Chains.

7. Are you willing to take risks for the privilege of gathering with the church? The history of the church is a history of persecution and risk-taking for the glory of Christ. Are there any Risks the Lord is calling you to take in the weeks and months ahead?

8. I suspect Paul knew many of the risks before he ever prayed asking the Lord to send him to Rome.

9. How should believers relate to their church? (They should relate Thankfully, Prayerfully, and third, We should relate

### III. Proactively (11-12)

Read 12-13

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—<sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

1. When Paul imagined what it would be like to spend time with the church of Rome, he saw himself imparting spiritual gifts to the brothers and sisters there. But the gifts he intended to give them were NOT the kind of spiritual gifts we usually talk about in church. Normally when we think of Spiritual Gifts we think of the gift of teaching, or administration, or Giving, etc. Paul taught about those special enablings of the Spirit for the edification of the church, but this is NOT what he has in mind here.

2. We know that because Paul speaks of a gift he will give. But (according to 1 Cor. 12:9), the spiritual gifts we normally talk about, are given exclusively by the Holy Spirit. Besides that, we should note that the "Spiritual Gift" he desires to give is singular (i.e. One gift) but the recipient of this gift is plural (that is "You all" (YALL!). It is one gift for a whole church!

3. So, what is this gift Paul intends to give them? Well, for the sake of time I will just say that the gift is his personal ministry of the word. Paul wanted to preach to them and teach them. He wanted to answer their questions about Jesus and the law and Gentiles being included in the church. This kind of teaching (in Paul's words v.11) "would strengthen you."

3.As they talked about those precious truths from Scripture, they would be mutually encouraged. Paul would not be satisfied with merely being the teacher. He wanted to enjoy being one of them as they all (including Paul) were edified by their Christ-exalting, gospel-centered fellowship. And as they did, they would also be encouraged by each other's faith.

4. So a Christian should relate to his/her church Thankfully, Prayerfully, Proactively, and now...

## IV Evangelistically: (13)

1. Now, I must confess that upon further reflection on this passage (after I turned in my outline to be printed) I concluded that the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> points in your outline are one and the same. So you can cross out the word “Fruitfully.” Paul is writing about his hope to evangelize everyone who will listen to Him preach the Gospel of God in Rome.

Read v. 13

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

2. When he arrives in Rome, he fully intends to preach the gospel. It didn’t matter whether his hearers were.

Read v. 14

“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.”

He would preach to them all with no distinction. Considering the benefits that were his in Christ despite the fact that he of all people had been a persecutor of Christ’s church, he felt a strong moral obligation to Preach the gospel with everyone.

Read v. 15

“So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”

3. Do you feel a similar obligation? Over the past few months, I have been blessed to see how many evangelistic opportunities have occurred among our church family. And I expect that as the new pressures are laid upon the church incoming days, new opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ will abound.

Has the Gospel of Jesus Christ affected your view of church?

- Has it made you more Thankful for the church?
- Has it made you more Prayerful toward the church?
- Has it made you more Proactive in your ministry in the church?
- Has it made you more Evangelistic for the sake of the church?
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May the Lord find us faithful in all of these ways for His glory and our own great joy