***Paul's Thanksgiving Prayer
RO04-01***

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Please turn with me to Romans 1. The first seven verses of the book of Romans, as you know, is one long sentence, and it is Paul's opening statement to a group of people that he has never met. These people are believers in the city of Rome – churches which just sprang up without any apostolic leadership. Neither Peter, nor Paul, nor John, nor any of the rest of them were in Rome, involved in the founding of this church and its various individual local assemblies that met around the city of Rome.

**Authority**

He has called attention to the fact that he speaks with authority. The fact that he is an apostle gives him the ground on which to speak to them in such a way that his instruction carries authority with it. They must listen to him, and they are obliged to obey what he brings to them. The thing he is talking about has been promised in the Old Testament concerning Jesus Christ, who is a God-man, and Paul has been called to the job of making this faith known to the gentile world.

So, he greets them as saints who are in Rome. You remember the word "saint" simply means somebody who is in the body of Christ. It is a positional word. It is not a word of experience. He greets them in the characteristic greeting of grace and peace, but in that order. First, the grace of God must work upon us, then we may hope for the peace of God. He says, "From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit is not mentioned here, but He is the one who is behind all of the instruction which is being given here, and the one who is responsible for dignifying and drawing glory and honor to the Son.

So, now we want to look at verses 8-10. In verse 8, we have a world of thanksgiving expressed by the apostle Paul. He says, "First: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all; that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." The word "first" is the Greek word "protos," and then it has a little word which is usually not translated: the word "men." This combination simply means that he is introducing something on the basis of what he has just declared in these first seven verses. You might say, "So, then."

Usually this little word "men" comes in a combination: "This being true; and, this being in contrast." It's a contrasting word. Here you have an unusual situation where it stands by itself. There's no contrast with it. It is simply an emphasis of Paul saying, "OK, now this being true. So, then this," and he moves into the next step of his letter. After reading the first seven verses, he begins verse 8 with: "So, then." Now he's going to introduce something as the result of what has preceded:

**Thanksgiving**

"So, then, I thank my God." The word "thank" is the Greek word "eucharisteo." This is why we use the word sometimes of the Lord's Supper as the Eucharist, meaning it's a service of thanksgiving. It's a remembrance of thanksgiving. The Lord's Table is a time of thanking God for what those elements represent. This is a strong word simply for gratitude. Paul says, "I am really thanking God," and he uses this very firm, strong Greek word.

It is in the present tense, which means that it is his constant practice. Here is something that Paul is saying: "I find I am able regularly to be thankful for." Paul, as of this point in his relationship with the Roman Christians, was able to say, "I am constantly thankful to God in your behalf." It is active, which means that Paul himself is expressing this Thanksgiving. It is in the indicative mood, which means that it is a statement of fact.

**The Recipient**

The recipient of this thanksgiving is "my God;" that is Jehovah Elohim, Paul's God, because of his personal relationship to this God through salvation which he secured through the Lord Jesus Christ. Here it is "God the Father" that is in view as the one who is responsible for something in these Roman Christians for which Paul is grateful. His gratitude to God is strongly stated.

**Gratitude**

Gratitude, as you know, is an important factor in preserving what blessing, or what good things, we have. Whatever you esteem in life, and whatever you value, I will caution you that one biblical principle (one doctrinal principle) is that it is necessary to be grateful for a thing that you esteem in order to retain it. Later, this first of Romans will demonstrate to us how far a human being can get off base when he is not grateful for something that's important and that he esteems. This chapter will tell us how mankind once had a brilliant, full understanding about the living God. They were not appreciative of it. They were not grateful for it, and in time, they became animals in their conduct of the most unimaginable type.

So, Paul is recognizing that gratitude is essential. In Romans 1:21, we read, "Because when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God; neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

**Indebted**

So, when Paul says, "I'm strongly grateful to God in behalf of the Romans Christians" (and he is referring to their spiritual maturity), one of the things he is doing is trying to preserve it. That is the way to preserve the things that are of importance and of value to us. You can't thank a person for something without, in the nature of the case, saying, "I'm beholden to you. I'm indebted to you. You have done me a service. You have done me a kindness. I am benefited because of this thing, and I'm thanking you for it. The very fact that I thank you for it shows that I am indebted to you in this respect." When you forget that you are indebted to God for the things that are important to you, you will lose them. God despises an ingrate.

**Through the Lord Jesus Christ**

"So then, I thank, with a deep gratitude, my God, through Jesus Christ." This doesn't mean that God the Father has become Paul's God through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is true. Not all men have God as their Father. Not all people have God as their Father – only those who have come into the family of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. But here, what he is probably referring to is that his gratitude is being presented through Jesus Christ. He is approaching God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ as the mediator.

You have this expressed in many other verses, as in Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17; and, Hebrews 13:15. We approach God through the Lord Jesus Christ, or we do not approach Him at all: "Through Jesus Christ for you all." In the Greek, the word "for" is "peri." Here it means "concerning." He is thanking God through the Lord Jesus Christ for something concerning the Christians in Rome.

**Faith**

Here's what he's grateful for: "That your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." The world "that" is the little Greek word "hoti." This is a little particle which is introducing the reason for Paul's gratitude. So, you may translate this as simply "because:" I am expressing this thanksgiving strongly to God through the Lord Jesus Christ concerning these Christians in Rome, because." Because of what? He says, "Because of your faith ("pistis"). The word "pistis" in the Greek language means "trust." It is confidence and trust in some object. Here it refers to personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, as well as trust in the Word of God as doctrine for living.

"Your faith," however, indicates that he is zeroing in on something which is particularly the possession of these Christians in Rome. He is stressing that they have something in the way of faith, and it is more than the fact that they believe in Christ as Savior. This is the word "faith" or "trust" used in terms of that which constitutes our faith, which is expressed in the form of the doctrines of the Word of God. It is this thing which is in our human spirits.

**The Human Spirit**

Remember that we all have a soul, when you are born again, we receive a human spirit, along with the soul. That human spirit is the place of your contact with the living God. It is this that God teaches through what you learn in doctrine. When you believe doctrine that is taken into the mind, it is placed in your human spirit. Then the human spirit directs your mentality in all the actions of your life, and then your mind tells your emotions what to do, and your mind tells your will what to do. This is the normal relationship between the elements of the soul and the spirit to one another. Anytime this is disrupted in the soul, it is very bad. It is bad for a person's soul to be disrupted.

For example, if this flow goes the other way, and the emotions are directing the mentality, then the person turns into an animal in his conduct. He is emotionally dominated in the soul, and the Word of God no longer can be brought to bear upon his actions; his thinking; his conduct; and, his choices.

So, Paul here is thanking them for their faith, and here is where their faith is. Their faith is the content of the Word of God, or we may call Bible doctrine, which is stored here in that human spirit. The Word of God has accumulated in their spirits, and it has had significant external demonstration. How did Paul know that these Roman Christians had accumulated a strong reservoir of Bible doctrine? Because he had reports on what they were doing, and he knew that what they were doing was reflecting that they were being guided by doctrinal principles. And the only way a human being can be guided by doctrinal principles is not from his perceptive mind where he learns things, but only from the directed mind where decisions are made. And that comes from the spirit. If the spirit is feeding up God's viewpoint, then a person acts according to God's viewpoint.

So, Paul is, interestingly enough, not grateful for the numbers. He does not say, "So then, I very deeply thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all: that your numbers have increased so mightily; that your services are so well-attended; that your buildings are so magnificently beautiful; and, that your chairs are so soft that you sit on so the believers can concentrate on the Word of God. I praise God for that." He doesn't say anything like that. He doesn't even commend them for the fact that they have the prestige of being at the center of the empire.

Remember that when you said you were at the center of the empire, which was what Rome was, that was the same thing as saying that you were at the center of the whole world. There was no world except the Roman Empire. That was all that there was to the world. He didn't command them for the fact that they were in the prestige churches of the empire – the churches of Rome. He commanded them for their faith. By that, he meant what was down in their accumulated knowledge of the Word of God in the human spirits.

**Spoken of throughout the World**

But the reason he praised God for this, he says is because this faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. The word "spoken" is the Greek word "kataggello." It is present tense, which indicates that it was constantly proclaimed. It was something that people were talking about. It is in the passive, which means that the Christians at Rome were not deliberately advertising themselves. This was not a public relations operation. This was not something where some nice church says, "We've got a lot of money. Why don't we get ourselves some public exposure?" And so they buy television time, and they advertise themselves in one way or another. This was not something they did. It was passive. It was something that was simply welling up from within their souls because their spirits were teaching them God's viewpoints. And it was indicative in form to indicate that this is a statement of fact.

Their storage of doctrine in their human spirit was a marvel to all who came in contact with the Christians of Rome, because the actions of the Christians of Rome were commending their faith to unbelievers and to believers alike. The fame of the Roman Christians was known throughout the empire, which meant it was known throughout, in effect, the whole world.

So, let's take a look for a moment at what God commends in a church. These churches in Rome sprang up without an apostle. What caused them to come into being? It was simply the fact that Christians, streaming in and out of the Roman Empire constantly, brought the Word of God. A body of believers arose, and they organized themselves into churches. They had limited information, but such as they had, they operated on. This is why Paul, recognizing how important the location of Rome was to everything that took place in the empire, was eager to get to Rome and to instruct them. He says, "I want to bring spiritual blessings and spiritual instruction, because what the Christians of Rome thought affected the Christians throughout the empire, and the Christians everywhere.

So, these Christians had sprung up without the excellent kind of instruction that some of the other New Testament churches had had from their very founding. And yet, these congregations in Rome were an example of growth in knowledge and in divine viewpoint, which he calls faith. They were lighthouses of spiritual illumination, and the thing that is unusual about this is that it was generally true of them.

It is not unusual to find a Christian who is a lighthouse of the Word of God. It is not unusual, perhaps, to find a Christian who gets with the Word of God; who respects it; who is not contemptuous of the world; who takes it in; who learns it; and, who replies it, and he becomes a lighthouse to everybody around him. But to find a church where you have just a whole congregation of lighthouses – that's something. And then to find churches all over town that are lighthouses, that really is something. And that's the kind of thing you had in Rome. These people responded to what they knew, and God kept bringing them more information.

So, their faith was not respected and honored because they had a kind of a sentimental sweetness and sincerity about them. A lot of churches want to claim fame as believers because they love everybody. If you ask them to tell you something about their church, one of the first things they may say is, "Oh, we just all love everybody." If that is true about them, you know that they are a bunch of weirdos to begin with, because by love, they mean a sentimental emotional response.

It is true that a congregation can have total "agape" love (lack of mental attitude bitterness toward anybody in the congregation), which is what we should indeed have, so that we are free of any ill will, and we are thus open to goodwill toward each individual, whoever he may be. While that is true, it is not always true that we may have an emotional, exciting attachment. There are some people that you do not come to church on Sunday morning and look forward to meeting. It is true that in any large group, there are some people you don't particularly get all hot about seeing every Sunday morning. But what you have here is not that as the basis of commendation. It was because they had learned doctrine; they had believed it; and, they had utilized it. Therefore, Paul said, "You are reflecting this in what you're doing: your service for the Lord; and, your personal conduct, and you are a lighthouse." That's what they were being commended for. But we like to commend ourselves for the fact that in our church, everybody is sweet toward one another.

Nor did that arise because they sat around hoping for the best, and sure that somehow things would work out. It was not a church that sat around and just was somehow waiting for the Lord to move and carry on the work. That is true in a certain respect. As a matter of fact, it is a very dangerous thing when a congregation does not know when it is time to sit and wait – when it is time to wait for the Lord to give direction and to move. It is important sometimes to know when you should not do a thing.

I remember after Mr. Howard jumped out of the airplane the last time he gave me dual instruction, and it was toward the close of the day, and we had been making landings and takeoffs. He said, "Okay, try it by yourself once." I said, "Try it by myself?" I said, "Don't you think it's getting a little too late in the day?" And he said, "No, it's all right," and he slammed the door shut. So, I tried it by myself. I'm happy to tell you, just so you won't wonder, I got back. I got went up, and went around the field, and made my landing, and had soloed. When I opened the door, I said, "Now I can fly by myself." He said, "Yes, but it's more important to know sometimes when not to fly." And that's the point. Sometimes you do have to wait upon the Lord. Sometimes it's important to know not to do something, but to wait upon the Lord.

However, these people were not commanded because they were like many churches who simply do not come to grips with their problems; simply do not move ahead; simply wait until everything is just sweetness and roses and light, and just peachy pie before they do anything. This was a church which obviously was moving ahead. As a matter of fact, they were moving ahead so forcefully in the Lord's work that a lot of them, in time (once the Roman government became antagonistic to them) became food for the lions in the arenas.

It was trusting God's doctrines that was the distinctive thing about them. It was a church with a group of people who had strong spiritual maturity structures. They were an example of faith. They were not famed for their buildings. They were not famed for the beautiful architecture, as many churches today love to achieve the same. They were not famed for the fact that they had a wonderful pulpit personality that everybody flocked to here. They didn't even have a lady preacher to stimulate the attendance. If you have a lady preacher, particularly if she's good looking, you'll draw a lot of people; particularly, if she is shapely and wears nice fitting gowns. Boy, you'll draw a big crowd. There used to be a gal like that out on the west coast, and she was really a marvel. It was terrifically interesting to attend church services. But they didn't even have that.

It wasn't: "Oh, I thank God for the famed personalities. Your pastors are so suave. They're so derogare. Their elocution is so mellifluous. They didn't even know those words. As a matter of fact, they might not be sure that you weren't swearing at them had you used them. That wasn't the thing for which Paul was thanking God in their behalf.

Nor was it because there were famous people who were buried beneath the floors of the church. You know, you go to some cathedrals in Europe, and their famous is what? It's because there are great names of great people whose bones were rotting under the floor. And you walk over these same personalities of history. Probably all these Romans had under their buildings (the homes they met in) were a few dead rats, ant that was about it. They had nothing like that for their fame.

Nor were they famed for their music and their choirs, or the gowns that their choir wore. They were not famed for that for which many churches have nothing else to claim but their music.

They were not famed for their social life. They were not known as the wonderful church where we all get together and have a Wednesday night supper: "We are the church that feeds your stomach." They were not famed for that.

Nor were they famed because they had a lot of emotional slush that they shared with one another under the guise of describing how God had blessed them. When doctrine is not in the soul, and the emotions take over, then one of the things that happens with this reversal is that emotional slush becomes the keynote of the day. That's what the Christians begin meeting together to share with one another.

I am always appalled when I hear someone say, "Oh, we just went to this college organization. They had a big rally. We just had a wonderful time sharing all the things that the Lord has done for us." Well, it is very legitimate, and very right, and very important to share with one another what the Lord has done. There is a time for a testimony meeting, and we know what that is. We know how to have testimony meetings where we do share what God has done for us. But the problem is that if you get a group of people together who are not oriented to doctrine, and they begin sharing what the Lord has done for them, it inevitably devolves into emotional slush. And here's what's going to happen:

Some poor character is going to come in, and he's going to get all excited over the fact that he's just been to a slush meeting. He's going to understand that this is what he's supposed to do. So, pretty soon, he thinks about things that the Lord has done for him, and he can come up with a couple of things that really are great. So, he gets up, and he contributes to the slush of the meeting of what God has done for him. The next meeting time comes, and he doesn't have so much to contribute, but he does the best he can. In the third meeting, he has really run dry. What does he do? He starts inventing; he starts creating; and, he starts developing something that he can contribute to the group. Otherwise, they may think that he is not growing and going on with the Lord.

**Emotions**

This is a horrendous, hideous thing. And college organizations love to do this, because most college people are just stupid to begin with. They were born stupid, and they got worse after that. And unless they have the Word of God, there is no way that they can spot somebody who's coming along and manipulating their emotions. This is one of the things we're going to look at in the four-generation curse. We'll get to that in the next session. If you have a parent in your family who is an emotional slush-oriented parent, you're going to have a lot of trouble, because you're going to have an influence upon you that, unless you tell it out of your being, is going to cause you to go right down the same blind, stupid spiritual pattern as they have, and you will never have spiritual stability.

Emotions which are not under the control of the mind and the Word of God are emotions that are destroying your spiritual stability. They will rob you of every blessing that God ever has for you. You will never be able to meet the right person to marry if emotions are running your soul. You will never be able to come into the fortune that perhaps God has for you materially. You'll never be able to find anything in life that God has designed for you, because your emotions will override the will of God in your life every time.

So, it is important to notice that this was not that for which Paul was commending these people. He was commending them for the very opposite thing – that there was a residue of doctrinal understanding, which he called faith, that made these people not only outstanding individual believers, but an outstanding group of believers as a local church.

All of these can make a momentary splash like throwing a rock in the quiet surface of a pond. The ripples show up, and you get fascinated for a while as you watch the ripples. But after a while, they're gone, and then there's nothing. And every one of these elements (and many more that we could have mentioned) are just ripples that are going to be lost in time. Real fame is teaching doctrine to a body of believers who believe it, and who operate on it. But I can guarantee you that both the preacher and the believing congregation who do that will be despised and belittled. Under our system of values today, that kind of a congregation will not be esteemed. That kind of a minister will not be esteemed. That kind of a preacher will not be honored, because he has done the unforgivable thing in our society. In Satan's angelic conflict, he has proclaimed the Word of God, and told people that there's nothing else that's important except that. That is ministering to human needs in a way that enables them to develop the capacity to receive God's blessings.

Again, I don't want to be misunderstood. I am not saying that you will not get excited about the Word of God, or that you will not get emotionally involved with the Word of God, and with what God is doing in your life, because you will. But it will be emotions that flow in the right direction – from the directive mentality to the emotions, guiding them so that the emotions know what is of value and what is not. Your emotions have no guidance except what the mind gives to them. Other than that, they're just a little floating boat cut adrift.

So, a church of faith through doctrine is a marvelous thing, but it can also lose its blessed position. Satan is constantly pressurizing that kind of believer. He is constantly attacking it. Paul could write this about the saints here in Rome and say, "I just thank God for you. Marvelous! Wonderful! I thank God for you."

However, you know where the church of Rome went, don't you? It became the horrendous Roman Catholic Church that brought 1,000 years of darkness upon humanity in the dark Middle Ages. This is the very same church that Paul is thanking God for. Somebody along the line became an ingrate for what God was doing through the Word for these people, and what that church was at one time, and what those believers were, was lost. Christians in Rome simply degenerated into the Roman Catholic Church.

**The Techniques of the Christian Life**

This is why the techniques of the Christian life are so important, because it is the techniques of the Christian life that lie at the core of maintaining this for which Paul was thanking God in these people – a spiritual maturity that goes on and that remains. One of the techniques of the Christian life is prayer, and one of the factors of prayer is thanksgiving (gratitude). So, the techniques go to the heart of the matter of maintaining that for which Paul thanks God here.

It's good to thank God for the right things that Christians do. We should not only come and bemoan what Christians don't do, and then pray for their errors. This is an unfortunate thing that we fall into. I hear many times of things that people bemoan about what Christians are doing, but they don't often come to me and say, "I'm really thanking the Lord for what so-and-so is doing now." I know the Christians are going to act as clowns, and therefore, they need our sympathy and our care. And while they need prayer, that is what they should have. But there are times when they are responding to the Word of God, and we should be happy to be thanking God for that.

**Christian Service**

Verse 9: "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son; though, without seeking, I make mention of you always in my prayers." The word "witness" is the Greek word "martus." This is the word which is a legal term in the Greek language for a witness who stands in the court of law. "God" here is "*the* God, so, it's God the Father. Paul says, "God, with His omniscience, can testify to something concerning my private practice of prayer. God the Father is my authoritative witness whom I serve (Jehovah Elohim)." The word "serve" is the Greek word "latreuo." "Latreuo" is a service of a particular kind. It is the service of a priest before God. It is a religious service. It is the word for performing worship.

It is present, which tells us something about the apostle Paul: "I serve him constantly." Paul like ourselves, is in full-time Christian service. It is active. Paul himself is performing this service. And it is indicative – a statement of fact. He again says something very important. You will notice he says, "God, with His omniscience, can be my legal witness to the fact that I constantly (in full-time) serve Him with my spirit." "With my spirit" is the Greek preposition "en" plus the Greek word for spirit ("pneuma"). This has reference to Paul's human spirit. He serves God as the result of a human spirit filled with divine viewpoint – the very thing for which he is thanking God that is characteristic of the Roman Christians.

All genuine Christian service is based on God the Holy Spirit working through spiritual maturity in our human spirits. If you do not have spiritual maturity in your human spirit, you can perform very little "latreuo" service (very little priestly service) for God. The Christian who tries to serve God with an empty human spirit has to resort to emotional sublimation. The person who's going around all gaga about how wonderful and sweet the Lord is, is a person that's telling you, "I'm an empty shell in my human spirit. And that's why I'm blubbering off at the mouth about all these marvelous things of the Lord." You know when people are deeply moved by God. It is quite evident that they are very emotionally involved with what God is doing. But you also can tell when it's genuine – flowing from a human spirit that's filled with God's viewpoint. Without it, you become a fake. You're sharing your kicks (whatever kind it may be), and calling it blessing.

Christians often serve the Lord, in other words, with their souls. You should not serve God with your soul. If you try serving God with your soul, that's what you do when you kick your emotions into high gear. You serve God with your human spirit. If you serve God with your soul, what you will do is start operating with a clever, cunning, calculating mind.

A lot of Christian service is done by Christians who have clever, cunning, calculating minds. You will be operating from emotional challenges, and a great deal of Christian service is the result of somebody getting up, and tickling your emotions, and giving you a challenge.

A lot of service is done because a person is self-willed. He's a strong-will-powered person. So, he's pushy, and he bludgeons his way through, and lesser Christians fall all around him as this person takes charge. And every church, sooner or later, is plagued by the pushy, dominant person, particularly in the female realm.

What do you have? You have a person who maybe as sincere as anything you can imagine who is serving God with his soul instead of with his spirit. The apostle Paul, please note carefully, says, "I serve God with my spirit." Specifically, this service is in the gospel of His Son as an evangelist in the area and the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ (concerning Jesus Christ).

**Prayer**

Then the latter part of verse 9 tells us that Paul is a prayer warrior: "That without ceasing, I make mention of you always in my prayer." The word "that" is the Greek word "hos," and it simply means "how:" "how that without ceasing. That is a long Greek word: "adialeiptos." It means incessantly unremittingly; without stop; and constantly, Paul says that he is praying. That's what a poor warrior does. He specifically says that he "makes," and this is the Greek word for "do" ("poieo). It's really: "I do." He does something. It is present. He is a constant prayer warrior, and it is middle, which indicates that he personally has benefited by praying. For what? For other people. Why? Because other believers are a source of blessing to him. His well-being, as part of the body of Christ, is depending on what other believers are and do. When he prays for them, he is personally been benefited. It is indicative – a statement of fact: "I do."

What he does is he says, "I mention." The Greek word is "mneia," which means "remembrance: "I do," or "I make remembrance of you" (Christians in Rome whom he has never met, but whom he has heard of considerably. "Always" is the Greek word "pantote," and it simply means "at all times:" "I mention you at all times in." The word "in" is the Greek word "epi," which means "at the time of:" "my prayers." And this is the Greek word "proseuche," which is the Greek word specifically of prayers to God. There other words that indicate prayers either to man or to God, but this is a prayer exclusively to God. This is something that is between Paul and the Lord.

The nature of Paul's prayer is significant here. God is witness to his prayer habits. God is witness to our prayer habits. You may be real zinger as a prayer person in public. You may just wow them in prayer meeting with your praying, but God knows how you pray at home, and that's what impresses the Lord. God knows how you pray at work; how you pray when you're driving along in the car; and, how you pray when you have to change a tire on your car when you have an appointment, and all the other things you could be doing at that time. He is not impressed by what we do publicly. God knows what we do privately.

So, it is significant that Paul says, "I'm telling you people right here before God, who is my judge and my witness, that this is how I pray concerning you." He's practically taking an oath on it. He reached souls with the gospel by praying for them first. He prayed without ceasing. You notice Paul didn't say, "I preach without ceasing." (Thank God.) He did say, "I pray without ceasing." He didn't even say, "I witnessed without ceasing." That will strike to the core of some of your fundamentalist hearts, but he did not say that.

**Pray without Ceasing**

He said, "I do pray without ceasing." That is the key to the Christian life. That is technique number one of the Christian life. Prayer is a priestly service, and it is almost never close to believers. You can realize that there are some things that would be close to you in service of one kind or another. But prayer, even upon your sickbed, and even upon your deathbed, prayer is a service that you may perform.

A splendid example of this you might like to read about, in Luke 2:36-38, is Anna, the prophetess, who spent her life in the fantastic service of prayer. Some churches are very good at preaching doctrine and dignifying the Word of God, but they're very sloppy about their prayer life, particularly their corporate prayer life. And this does not become us as believers. Paul's prayer mentioned people personally. That's why we encourage you to use the Berean prayer guide.

He gave specific details. In this case, in verse 10, he made a request. He said, "It by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you." Prayer here was by the will of God, as we have described for us in Matthew 26:39. He was praying for people with the deepest love, and yet Paul was not the type to express his emotions publicly. There were some times when he did, but I can almost guarantee you that there were not too many times when people saw Paul wearing his emotions on his sleeve. They did not see Paul expressing the deep affection of his heart in some pseudo, fake way in order to impress people.

However, he did have a great hope. He said that his hope was to visit them: "Making requests," The word "making requests" is "deo." It is present. And again, it is middle, constantly for his benefit, he was making this request. A request to what? To be able to go to Romans: "If by any means." The Greek words are "ei" and "pos," which simply means "if at all." This is an element of doubt. Paul says, "I am making request, if at all (by any means)." It inserts some doubt on Paul's part that he will be able to do this: "Now, or at length" (we would say "at last"). This is the Greek word "ede" plus the word "pote." These two together equal "at length"). Paul says, "If by any means. I have some doubt, but I wish that somehow at last I might have a prosperous journey." "Prosperous journey" is "euodoo." It is future (sometime in the future). It is a passive. God would have to give it to him. It is indicative.

What's the problem here? Why is there this uncertainty? This series of words indicate a great uncertainty ("ei pos") – "If by any means. I'm really not sure. "Ede pote (now, at last – finally), I'll have a prosperous journey to Rome." He's writing this book from Corinth. He's on his way to Jerusalem to deliver this offering. He's been told all along the line, "Paul, don't go to Jerusalem. If you go to Jerusalem, imprisonments and trials await you." Several people sent by the Lord said, "Don't go. Don't go. Don't go." Paul's heart was yearning to go to Rome. What an impact he could make in that center – the center of the whole world. Instead, he fell into the trap of associating with the pastors who were legalistically oriented. They talked him into taking a Jewish vow. He performed an act of legalism; started a riot; and, got himself into prison for four years. Two years later, he got to Rome as a prisoner. He got to Rome: "Finally (if by any means – at last."

However, when he said this (when he was writing this), he could have finished this book and told his associates, "Boys, let's pack up. We're leaving Corinth, and we're headed for Rome. And he could have gone then. He could have gone in freedom. Instead, he fell into an act of legalism that cost him four years of imprisonment: "That I might have a prosperous journey." He could have had it:

"By the will of God to come on to you." The will of God, of course, was the critical feature in all of Paul's life. The Greek words for this are "En thelema:" "And to come" ("erchomai"). This is aorist – at any point when God says, "Go." It is active. Paul would go. It is infinitive. This was the will of God, and this was the desire of Paul: "Unto you" is the Greek word "pros," and it means face-to-face. He wanted to go to sit in a group; to sit in their homes; and, to sit where they met, and to be able to teach them face-to-face on the basis of this magnificent letter that we're going to study completely, which gives the most formal, complete presentation of the gospel and the Christian life which flows from it.

What he brought them is the same thing that the Word of God brings to us week-by-week. So, when Paul was through talking to the Roman Christians, they had not one whit more than what we can have today, in that same splendid human spirit, functioning on God's viewpoint. We trust that that's true of you.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1975

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