

“PASSIONATE FOR GOD’S PEOPLE”

Text: **Romans 1:8-13**

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I. The apostle Paul continues with the introduction of his letter to the Romans. I believe that it is in this portion of Scripture where the passion of Paul for his Lord and Savior is transformed into the compassion of Paul for the Lord’s people. It is from these six verses that we get an incredible glimpse into the tenderness of this minister, this messenger to the Gentiles. Let’s just take an expositional look at these verses.

[**Rom 1:8**] FIRST, let’s look at the word “First.” I’m indebted to the commentary of Dr. M. Lloyd-Jones for mentioning this. You may have noticed in reading on throughout the next several verses that he never says, “second” nor continue to a “third.” You might expect that there would be a list from the most logical, brilliant, and scholarly mind of his day; as if he has several things that he intends to tell the Christians at Rome; yet, rather than continuing on in his logical direction, something occurs to him and he goes in another direction, never coming back to finish what it was he started to say. *Anacoluthon* is a fancy word that literary types for this kind of thing. This is characteristic of Paul’s writing because, as Dr. Lloyd-Jones puts it, “His heart was as big as his brain.” Sometimes, in his writings, Paul digresses in a thought for quite awhile before he returns to the original thought... or else just leaves us hanging. This is encouraging to me as I sometimes do this in my sermons; or even my conversations. Why? Because more important than some agenda I have is what the Holy Spirit desires to do through me for others and in me for Himself. This is what it means to be Spirit-led rather than purpose-driven.

Notice what sidetracks Paul in this verse: (1) gratitude to God; (2) and that, for the Roman Christians; (3) for the recognition of their faith by the world.

Paul also says, “my God.” Although I have mentioned, that in public prayers as a congregation, we typically pray “we,” “us,” or “our” ie., “*Our Father...*” “Give *us* this day *our...*” (there are certainly exceptions publicly and it is quite alright to say “I”); yet, Paul gives us a clue into his private prayer life by saying, “my God.” He approaches God within his personal prayer time with an intimate personal relationship “through Jesus Christ” whose blood has given him bold access, confident access, to the throne of grace.

[Rom 1:9] Here we do understand that it is Paul’s personal, private prayer life he is speaking about because “God is *his* witness;” not his ministry companions; not the church leaders of Corinth; but God was the witness to his love for the saints, all saints; but in this letter, most especially, to those he was writing to.

A love and passion for God’s people will never be a true expression if it is not cultivated in private, personal prayer with our heavenly Father as witness. If my prayer life is passionate, my people-life will be compassionate. I am most short-tempered, impatient, and put-out with others when my prayer life is lacking.

[Rom 1:10] The NASB reads, “...always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.” And, near the end of this letter, in **chapter 15**, Paul expresses that he desired to come to Rome for years but was hindered, and in that chapter, requests from the Roman Christians that they would pray for him to be delivered from the Jews that opposed him, and that he would come to them “with joy by the will of God.” This is interesting because, here, near the end of his third missionary journey, he will soon go to Jerusalem, will be arrested, and eventually make his way to Rome.

[Rom 1:11-12] Certainly, we realize that Paul is called by God as an apostle (**v1**); that his going to this particular body of believers, being predominantly Gentile, although mixed with Jewish and Gentile believers, they might be especially established in the seat of the Roman empire by he who was called as an apostle to the Gentiles in particular (**Rom 13:11**; as well as **Rom 15:16**; **Gal 2**; **Eph 3**; **1 Tim 2**; **2 Tim 1**)... YET,

I believe these verses speak of far greater and more important things than that, both for

the believers of Paul's day, as well as for all believers since the holy inspiration of this letter. [turn to **1 Cor 12:25-27**] Paul writes this letter to the Christians at Rome from Corinth toward the end of his third missionary journey. During that journey, while ministering to the churches in Asia Minor from Ephesus, he must write to the Corinthians to correct a number of problems within that local church. At one point, in his first letter to the Corinthians, he teaches about spiritual gifts; yet, he does so in a way so that we understand these gifts as they function similarly to the way our body functions: many members with different parts, yet one body. We are all different and unique, gifted by the Holy Spirit in various ways for the proper functioning of the body. It's interesting that each member of our physical body exists for the benefit of every other member of the body. Interestingly, with Paul's spiritual analogy of the church being like a body, we realize that if a limb or body part were missing, an eye, a leg, &etc., the whole body could still function, but it would not function as it was designed. When an organ or body part begins to function in a way that deprives the other parts of their usefulness, or functions so that it feeds itself and forsakes the rest of the body, there is a medical name for such a phenomenon: CANCER. [read **1 Cor 12:25-27**]. Notice **v26b**, when "one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." I believe that this is what Paul is speaking of in **Rom 1:11-12**.

The spiritual gift, the *χαρισμα πνευματικον*, that I believe Paul desires to impart to them (**v11**) has to do with mutual encouragement we have as believers in the mutual faith, as he does so state (**v12**). This is consistent with what he wrote to the Corinthian Christians concerning spiritual gifts, saying that when "one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (**1 Cor 12:26**); in fact, he tells the Corinthians in **chapter 12** of the first letter that they should earnestly desire the best spiritual gifts; yet, the more excellent way is love. After somewhat defining the supernatural characteristics of *agape* love (**1 Cor 13**), Paul tells the Corinthians, "Follow after *agape* love, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy" (**1 Cor 14:1**). [turn to **1 Cor 14:1-3**]

Although the Greek word for "prophesy" means to predict or foretell future events, it also means "to speak forth by divine inspiration" or "to utter forth, to declare, a thing which can only be known by divine revelation." Now, certainly the 1st century Christians of Paul's day had prophets that spoke with divine inspiration because the New

Testament Scriptures were being written at the time. Yet, when these prophets prophesied, they did not contradict Old Testament Scriptures. Since we have the inspired Scriptures of the New Testament, and we're told in the Bible not to add or take away from the prophecy of this book (**Rev 22:18-19**), we might consider that prophecy, in general, is merely speaking forth the Word of God. What I'm doing is prophesy: speaking forth the Word of God. [*read 1 Cor 14:1-3*]

(1 Cor 14:3) The Word of God edifies, exhorts & comforts; that is, it builds up, encourages or provokes, and comforts or reassures. [**Rom 1:11-12**] Based upon what we've seen here, let's consider what we've read in **Rom 1:11-12**, and especially **v12**, "...that I might be comforted (reassured) together with you by our mutual faith."

Simply, **Rom 1:11-12**, has been stated in another way by John Bunyan in his treatise, *Christian Behaviour*: "That the best way both to provoke ourselves and others to good works, it is to be often affirming to others the doctrine of justification by grace, and to believe it ourselves." In other words, speaking the truths of God's Word, especially the gospel of Christ, and Him crucified, is the impartation of the spiritual gift that Paul speaks of in **v11**. In fact, Paul says just that a few verses later [**v15**]; and then in detail through nearly the rest of the epistle.

[**Rom 1:13**] Though he was restrained ("let") from coming to them, and though he planned and purposed to do so often, Paul wants them to know that in coming to them, it will bear fruit in his own life. Why? because, as if reiterating the truth of **1 Cor 12:26**, "when one member is honoured, all members rejoice with it." His life bears fruit because of the blessing he brings them through the gospel of grace.

Yet, this is true for every Christian in the simplest and most general way. When we encourage one another in the gospel of grace, not nit-picking in particulars (for we are all at different spiritual maturities), but because of a genuine desire to see the brethren comforted and encouraged in and with the gospel of Jesus Christ, it also bears fruit in our lives. We are blessed when the brethren are blessed. We are built up in faith when the brethren are built up in faith. We are encouraged when the brethren are encouraged. We are comforted when the brethren are comforted.

II. Some might call the reality of Paul's receiving spiritual benefit from his blessing others as an ulterior motive for his visit and his planned actions among them; but those who would suggest such a thing are spiritually blind. Paul merely presents the reality of truth that exists in a body of believers moved by the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit.

What is important to see here, as the Holy Spirit reveals these truths, is the tenderness behind this man for these people; a man who was once radically depraved in sinful flesh; who was radically saved by God's grace; who was radically transformed by the revelation truth of Jesus Christ the living Word; who has grown by God's grace from faith to faith; and because of this amazing grace of God, he has a supernatural love for God's Son, Jesus Christ, a supernatural passion for God's truth, which has given him a supernatural compassion for God's people.

Do we recognize that God is glorified in us when we demonstrate this incredible passionate love for one another? When Jesus gave us a new commandment, it was new because it was specifically for His church; the church He built; the church He bled for; the church He died for; and the church He is coming again for. He said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (**John 13:34-35**).

III. Finally, I would like you to consider this concerning the apostle Paul and this part of his letter to the Roman Christians: his passionate tenderness and compassion for them is so genuine that he wants them to know his earnest prayers for them; he wants them to know his desire to be with them. In reading this portion, it's as if the Holy Spirit testifies of the tears Paul has shed for these Christians, as all the Christians in all the churches he has ministered unto; tears of joy as well as tears of sorrow. You can almost imagine his hearing of news from Rome that so-&-so is sick; or someone has died; or so-&-so's mother and father have be converted to faith in Christ.

Now, I want to be careful how I present this last thought... because it could be misunderstood as pride or arrogance on my part; or even as trying to draw attention or sympathy for myself, which is not my intent. I only use this, from this portion by way of

further illustrating the connectedness of the body by the supernatural gifts of grace within a local body of believers, such as we are, as members of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church.

We, as grace people, may even be more prone to getting out of step with this truth, especially because we encourage one another to read a myriad of books by such tremendous authors: John Bunyan, Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, &etc. But these men, though mightily used of God, both then, and now through the written page, are not our pastors or our brothers, as it relates to our local body of believers, right here and right now. Even men today, whom we respect or admire; whom I respect and admire and have learned a great deal from: John Piper, Henry Mahan &etc. Though we may be encouraged by their sermons and books, most of them, or perhaps every one of them, do not pray for you, shed tears for you, call you or visit you.

Although I may be hindered or restrained from coming to you at times, visiting you at times, you are on my heart, you're on my mind, and you are in my prayers. The same is true with Paul as expressed in this letter. Yet, it is not merely for the minister; this is the truth and reality for every Christian believer. We pray for one another; we shed tears of joy or tears of sorrow for one another; we call one another; we visit one another; we love one another as Jesus loved us; and by that the world may know that we are Christ's disciples.

The apostle Paul was filled with tenderness and compassion for his brothers and sisters in Christ because of the reality of the wonderful doctrine of grace, the gospel of Christ and Him crucified, which he will explain for the rest of the letter. He writes this beautiful and beloved introduction to this epistle because of the incredible truths that course through his very being; and those truths being expressed from **Rom 1:17** and beyond.

Is the reality of your supernatural salvation by God's grace manifested in your passionate love for God's people? If not, then what idol, or pillar of pride, or impurity is hindering the truth of God's Word from being a reality in your life? We must retreat to our prayer closets and seek Him for revelation of that sin by the truth of God's Word;

release from that sin by the precious shed blood of Christ; and victory over that sin by the resurrection power of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.