

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Marks of True Spiritual Service, Part 3

Scripture: Romans 1:13-16a

Code: 45-07

Let's look at Romans chapter 1 tonight. This is the last easy part in Romans. The next three years in chapter 1 are going to prove to be... No, this is the last of the introductory messages and then beginning in our next study, next Sunday evening, we will get into verse 16, the gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation which is the theme of the book. And then we'll move through this tremendous presentation. And we're going to move at a rate that we don't lose our perspective. So, I really feel God's going to change some lives as we go through.

But for tonight, we're ending up looking at the section beginning at verse 8. Because it's been a while, I'd like to read--as you follow--verse 8 through the first part of verse 16.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world, for God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit and the gospel of His Son that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making requests if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you; for I long to see you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift to the end you may be established. That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that often times I purposed to come unto you but was prevented thus far that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor, both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

Now in those very important statements, the Apostle Paul teaches us some principles of true spiritual service. Now I know that for the most part we know these principles. Through the years we've gone over them in many passages and so tonight, it's just going to be a kind of picking up maybe what we've forgotten, kind of reaffirming some things.

There was an old German artist by the name of Hoffmann. He painted majestically. And many of his greatest works were hanging in the Royal Gallery in Dresden. And periodically, through the door would come the artist Hoffmann. And in his hand he would have a little pouch filled with paints and brushes. And he would spend a couple of days touching up his masterpieces, maybe where the color had faded, where the canvas might have shown a little bit, he would just touch it up.

And in a very real sense, I believe, that that's perhaps what the Lord Jesus Christ wants to do with us. It isn't that we don't understand these truths. It isn't that we haven't already painted the picture, but maybe it's just time for a little touch up because in the living of life it's very easy for some spots to fade, isn't it? In our service to Christ, sometimes we get a little bit threadbare and the canvas shows through and the color just isn't what it was. And so I want you to look at this as if the Lord Himself took a brush and wanted to touch up some of the faded color of your life.

Now we're talking about spiritual service and we're seeing that the Apostle Paul in verses 8 to 16, opens up his heart. And in all of those statements that I just read to you which don't really seem to flow logically, you may say they're kind of random but if you say that you've missed the point. Because there is a marvelous flow as he opens up his heart. In writing to the Romans, people he'd never met, he wanted them to get to know him. And there's no way for people to get to know you better than for you to open up your heart to them. And so he shares with them not his theology first, not his doctrine, not his convictions, not his goals and purposes in terms of the calling of God, not his ministry, but he shares with them his heart. He opens up the inside and gives them his life.

I had the wonderful privilege of going to seminary at Talbot Theological Seminary and I can promise you that I learned something from the books I read. I learned something from the notes I took. I learned something from the papers I wrote. But I learned more from the lives of the men who taught me than I ever learned from anything that they said in class. The courses were important but I was watching men's attitudes. I was watching their desires. I was watching their motives. I wanted to know not what they said but why they said it. And I really believe that's what Paul does with the Romans here. I think he opens his heart and says I'm about to say some things that are important but before I give you my theology, let me give you myself. And so we are seeing the incomparable Paul unbare his heart in regard to the real stuff that characterized his spiritual service.

And I think this is the focus of all of us who serve and we're all called to serve. Romans 6:22 says that, we have become servants of Christ. We're all called to serve. And I think that the principles of spiritual service that Paul reveals from his own heart become models for all of our service. We may not have Paul's apostolic calling. We may not have his remarkable and unique gifts, but we can sure have his motives and his attitudes and his desires.

Now the key phrase, would you please notice, is in verse 9. And it's the phrase, "For God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son." He's talking about the heart of service, spiritual service, not the outward but the inward. The statement "I serve with my spirit." He uses the word *latreuo*, it's always used for religious worship or religious service. It came to mean the inner worship of the heart. And he is saying that my true hearted worshipful whole hearted service to God is along these lines. And surrounding that statement, he gives us insight into how he served. He doesn't talk about a lot of his activities, a lot of his methods, just his heart. And he says my service is the true service of the heart.

Now I don't know about you but that's the way I want to serve the Lord. Believe me, I have a fear that there could be a time in my own life when I serve the Lord mechanically, when I serve the Lord externally, when I was just cranking out activity, when I was just filling up the program, when I was just doing the ministry, quote/unquote, but the worshiping heart wasn't there. I think it's important that we understand what's in that phrase, to serve with a worshiping heart.

What does it mean? What separates that from everybody else's spiritual activity? Well, we already went through two looks at this text about six weeks ago, and this is the third. And I just pray that the artist himself will touch up your canvas wherever the color has faded. Let's just be reminded of the marks of true spiritual service.

What do we see in Paul's statement here? The first mark of true spiritual service is a thankful spirit. Verse 8, that's where he begins, "First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Paul's heart was a thankful heart. He was always thankful for other people. And we went through that in many of his epistles. It is characteristic of true spiritual service that it is marked by a thankful spirit. You show me a person who serves the Lord grudgingly, who serves the Lord with grit in his teeth, who serves the Lord bitterly and I'll show you someone who doesn't serve worshipfully from the heart because a worshiping heart is a thankful heart. And the reason you can be thankful no matter what happens in your service is because you're just thankful to have the privilege no matter what happens.

Secondly, we learned that true spiritual service is marked not only by a thankful spirit but by a concerned spirit. While on the one hand you're thankful, on the other hand you're concerned. Verse 9, he says "Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." You show me someone whose heart is constantly in prayer over his people and I'll show you someone who serves from the heart. It isn't just showing up and doing your thing, it's caring enough to pray, thankful to God for what was done and yet deeply concerned for what was not yet done. True spiritual service involves a thankful spirit and a concerned spirit.

Thirdly, a willing spirit. Verse 10, "Making request," he says, "in my prayers if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you." This is tremendous. He is praying for them and he is saying to God I'm willing to be the answer. I know you have problems in Rome and I'm praying for you and I'm asking God to let me be part of the answer. That's a willing spirit. That's not praying at arm's length, that's praying and saying here am I, Lord, send me.

And then we've already learned that spiritual service is marked by a submissive spirit. The end of verse 10 says, "I would like to have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you." In other words, everything has to be ordered by God's perfect will. There's no panic. There's not trying to stretch yourself out, trying to gain your reputation, trying to broaden your influence for personal

reasons. There's an utter submission to the will of God. Self-styled Messiahs are always megalomaniacs. They always want to win the world and nothing short of it and they get very upset when something stands in their way. They don't have any economy of effort. They don't know what it is to be limited by God's will, they just go out and try to do as much as they can as big as they can and little thought is ever given to what God might will. The true servant of God submits all his plans to God's will. He's not in the business of competing with God.

I told you some years ago that a reporter asked me if I had a desire to build a church. I said no. He says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Jesus said He'd build the church and I'd rather not compete with Him." I have no desire to build the church. I only have a desire to be faithful to the one who is building it. If He picks up this tool, I want to be useful, that's all. No personal ambition.

So, true spiritual service is being thankful for what God has done, yet concerned that there is more to do, willing to be used to do it if God so wills. So you're not pushy about it.

Fifthly, true spiritual service is marked by a loving spirit. Verse 11, "For I long to see you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift to the end you may be established." Now I'll ask you a very simple question and you can answer it easily in your mind. What one thing makes people want to give to others? What is it? It's love. It's love. "For God so loved that He...what?...gave." It is love that makes us want to give. And Paul says I long to see you. And the idea there is of a great internal desire, and I want to give you a spiritual gift to see you established. That is a loving spirit. He wasn't saying I want to broaden my reputation...I want to see if I can knock off Rome...I want to see if I can become famous and reach the high ups. His desire was not for himself but to give something to them. That's so important. True love is always measured in what it gives not ever in what it takes or wants. Love would take anything, it would accept anything and return only the highest good to the one who offended. That's what love would do. Love always gives back good. It always seeks the best, no matter how it is abused or wounded. And Paul says I long for you and I want to give you something.

Is that the way you look at your service? When you go to a Bible study to teach or when you go to a Sunday-school class, or when you come to sing in the choir or when you do that that you do, helping in the kitchen or working with some folks in some project or being involved in evangelism, do you approach that thing with a longing in your heart that overwhelms you because you have so much that you want to give? That's how it should be. And so many times we go at it thinking of what we might get...what they'll think of me...what this will bring to me.

True spiritual service is all about a loving spirit and a loving spirit knows only about giving, not getting. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." I'll spend, that means I'll use all my resources. I'll be spent, that means I'll die. Even though the more I love you, the less you love in return. That was a

loving spirit. And I don't think you can minister effectively in any way without a loving spirit. And a loving spirit seeks to give, not get.

Oh, there's so much loveless selfish service. There's so much legalism for personal appearance sake that's so far from this. And by the way, when you serve like that there is a reciprocating joy that comes.

Number six, still reviewing, true spiritual service is marked by a humble spirit. I just love this. Verse 12, he says, "I want to come and see you and be with you and establish you, that is...and I like this...that I may be comforted together with you by our mutual faith." That is so gracious. He is saying I want to come and give you a spiritual gift and establish you and...oh, I also want to be comforted by you as well. Paul doesn't see himself as some know-it-all with spiritual pride, he's going to come in and unload on everybody. Who himself could receive nothing for he's all sufficient. With all of this high level of spiritual commitment there was no sense of spiritual pride in his life. That, by the way, is the ugliest of all evils. He said I want to learn together with you. I want you to teach me.

Now let's go to the final marks of spiritual service. A fruitful spirit...a fruitful spirit, verse 13, "Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that often times I purposed to come unto you." And then he tells them that the reason he didn't come was that he was prevented by the Lord. "I wanted to come to you in order that I might have some fruit among you, even as also among other Gentiles."

Paul's view of the ministry was, now listen to this, that it was a quest for spiritual fruit. The ministry-- and you have to keep this in mind because it's so easy to lose this--the ministry is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end. The purpose of preaching is not preaching, the purpose of preaching is fruit. The purpose of ministry in music tonight is not ministry in music, it is fruit in your life. It is to get you to think about divine truth. It is to touch your heart. The purpose of any ministry is not the function itself, that is only the means to the end. The purpose is fruit...product, result. The quest for spiritual fruit was the mainspring of all apostolic activity. Jesus said, "I have ordained you that you should go and bring forth...what?...fruit." John 15:16, He sent them out to bring forth fruit.

Let me tell you something. A person who serves with the heart, a person whose spiritual service is genuine is only content with fruit. Some people are content with prestige. Some people are content with pure acceptance. Some people are content with money. You know, the devil even pumps that thought into my mind, you know that? A couple of weeks ago I was going through a low time in my life and I was thinking, you know, I just am not seeing the fruit that I want to see in the lives of our people. I had the thought, "What do you care? You're saved. You're going to heaven. Look at all the rest of the people who are going to heaven. You're well paid. I mean, at the worst, you've got a good job, a lot of security. They're nice to you. Pat your kids on the head. Like your wife. You can't lose."

Well, you see, you can be pressured by Satan to settle for something far less than what you ought to settle for. My reaction to that was, "Ah, I am not content to be taken care of, appreciated, have a nice thing going on. The only thing that makes me happy in the ministry is fruit." That's all. Result. And if you can settle for something less than that, then your service is external, not internal. I'm here for the fruit, folks, I'll promise you that. That's true. And when God shows me that there's more fruit somewhere else, I'll probably be somewhere else because I only live for the fruit, to see God's Word go forth and do its work. In 2 Timothy, chapter 2 verse 6, it says, "The farmer that labors, works hard, kopiaos, sweats, does it because he gets to be the partaker of the fruit."

You know, I guess that's why I love the baptismal services so much because...I just feel like I have a silly grin on my face the whole time. Because I see the fruit. Or when somebody writes me a letter, tells me what God's done in their life, or when somebody in the church comes and tells me how a person ministered to them and I see the fruit. God help me if I settle for anything less than that.

Now look at the beginning of verse 13. "I don't want you to be ignorant, brethren." And that little phrase is used by Paul many times and it is a phrase for emphasis on essential truth. Paul uses it when he talks about the doctrine of salvation. He uses it when he talks about the doctrine of Satan. He uses it when he talks about the doctrine of the Second Coming. He uses it when he talks about spiritual gifts. He uses it in a lot of very key places and he uses it again here. It's like saying get this and get it good because I don't want you to miss it. I want you to know that I wanted to come desperately in order that I might have some fruit among you. He's in effect saying I'm not interested in the amount of the love offering, I just want the fruit.

Keep this in mind. You can measure your commitment to Christ...now listen to this...by whether you are more concerned with what happens in others lives than you are with what happens in your own. Do you really get lost in what happens in the lives of other people?

Now what is fruit? Now we've gone over this before. But maybe you've faded a little at this point and we'll try to cover that patch with some new color. Basically in the Scripture, three things constitute fruit. One, that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control, right? That's what I call attitude fruit. Those are all attitudes, love's an attitude, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control...those are attitude fruit. Fruit is attitude. Paul is saying I want to come and see you with the right attitude, an attitude of love and joy and peace and gentleness and goodness and faith and meekness and self-control...Galatians 5:22 and 23.

Well, fruit is also action. That's right. It's not only attitude, it's also action. Fruit is what you do. In Romans 6:22, "But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness." And there he's talking about holy living...the fruit of your lips, which is praise; the fruit of your hands, Philippians 4, which is giving; the fruit of righteousness which is the behavior of your

life. So, you have attitude fruit and action fruit. He says not only do I want to see you with the right attitude, I want to see you with the right action.

Can I stretch you to a third kind of fruit? First, attitude; second, action; and third--are you ready?-- addition...addition fruit. Well, what do you mean by that? Well, Paul says I want to have some fruit among you even as among other Gentiles. Well, what kind of fruit are you talking about, Paul? I think he's talking about converts, don't you? First fruits, as he mentions in Romans 16:5, the first converts in an area. Fruit are the people that come to know Jesus Christ and are added--that's why I call it addition--fruit to the body. Paul desired to save men. He said that in 1 Corinthians 9:22, to see men saved.

So, Paul says my desire is to see believers with the right attitude, believers with the right holy life style and people added to the Kingdom. And I think the last one is the real thrust of this text. And, believe me, folks, the fruit was enormous when he got to Rome. I mean, it was tremendous. In fact, when he wrote back to the Philippians from Rome, he said, "All the saints in Caesar's household greet you." He had been used of God to win people in Caesar's household to Christ. And so he was in the ministry for fruit.

You know, I can promise you that I don't think I could survive a ministry of maintenance. Just getting a group of sanctified saints sitting around looking at each other. Got to have fruit. And that's the joy of service. I get just so excited about testimony after testimony after testimony of how God has changed lives. That's what it's all about. You know, I look at this world in its confusion and its chaos and its lostness and I hear all the idiocy that's pumped out in the name of human philosophy and all the stupidity that comes over the media and all of the lies and wrong answers and wrong opinions...my wife and I the other day walked into a store and two of the people who worked in the store were standing in the front and one said to the other, "Well, of course, anybody knows that Genesis is only a fairy tale." And the man says--he was Jewish--"Well, I agree with that, it's definitely a fairy tale." And the other, who was a lady, says, "Yes, but it's meant to teach us a mystical moral."

And then came this reiterated statement, "But obviously, anybody knows the account of creation in Genesis is not the truth." At that precise moment, my wife said, "Oh yes it is!" And they both did a double take--who is this woman? And I'm standing there with this grin on my face. Right? I said good for you. She said, "I just can't stand to hear people say things like that."

Well, you know, it just points up the folly of the world. They don't even know what they're talking about. And you know, to be able to crash into that world and bring somebody to the truth, that is what living is all about. That's what it's all about. Oh, don't ever get indifferent to that. True spiritual service is fruitful in spirit.

Number eight, true spiritual service is also marked by an obedient spirit...a thankful spirit, a concerned spirit, a willing spirit, a submissive spirit, a loving spirit, a humble spirit, a fruitful spirit and an obedient spirit. This is so good. Verse 14, Paul continues to talk about his attitudes and the reasons he serves, he says, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and the barbarians, to the wise and the unwise." He says I have an obligation. The ministry for me is not a whimsey. I didn't say one day, "Let's see, I could be a tent maker, go into my own business and build a tent plant. Or, I could be an attorney, I could be a lawyer with my logical mind, I might even become a politician. Or, I could become a preacher of the gospel...eenie, meenie, miney, moe." No, he didn't do it that way. For him it was a debt. It was an obligation to God. He owed a debt to God.

If you have forgotten, look for a moment at 1 Corinthians chapter 9...1 Corinthians chapter 9, verse 16, he says, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing in which to glory." In other words, it's true that I preach the gospel, but don't...don't give me an award for that. Don't name a city after me and a statue and give me honorary degrees. I don't have anything to glory. "Necessity is laid upon me, yea, I am cursed," that's what "woe is me" means, "if I don't preach." I mean, I am involved in a debt to God. "If I did it willingly, (verse 17) then I'd have a reward. But if it's against my will, then it is strictly a dispensation of God given to me." And it was against his will, he was on the way to killing Christians and the next thing he knew, God turned him around and called him into the ministry. And he was in against his will. He says don't commend me, he says I have a debt to pay. "God has brought this to pass."

A young man recently asked me, he said, "How can you week after week after week keep studying and studying and constantly preaching and preaching, what motivates you?" And I said to him, "Well, there are from time to time a lot of things. Some passages are so exhilarating in themselves that you're just kind of flying through the week and can't wait to get to Sunday. Other times you're battling time problems and priority things and you're fighting your way through and it really doesn't look that interesting and you just kind of struggle. And those are the times that you do it because you have a debt to pay to God who called you to preach." And if you're looking at Christian service like so many people, you do it only when you feel like doing it, then you haven't learned the kind of service that Paul understood right here. I mean, when you've just been hauled out of city...out of the city, thrown in the city dump dead because they've stoned you to death, and you are risen from the dead like he was, and you go right back into town and preach some more, that is a commitment to duty.

And sometimes that's all you have to go on. You have an obligation to God. Paul says, "I have a debt." And I think the implication of the text here is that his debt is really to God toward the Greeks and barbarians. I am debtor to the Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and the unwise. And I see, first of all, a debt to God on their behalf.

Secondly, there is a sense in which he has a debt to them. If I'm walking down the street and I pass a house and I see that the roof is on fire and the family is in another section of the house and I can see

them all sitting there. What is my responsibility? I could stand on the curb and say, "Oh my, I wonder if anyone knows them that could let them know their house is burning down." No...no, because they are in a dire situation and because I have the information that can save their lives, I owe a debt to them. If I'm going across a bridge and a fellow falls in the river, I don't say, "I wonder who might know this fellow to know whether he's worth saving." No, if I have a rope at my disposal or some means, I have a debt because of his need and my capacity to meet that need.

If I see a man cross my path who is destitute, who has no clothes or no food or no place to sleep and I have all of those things and say to him, "Be warmed, be filled," I have not discharged my debt. Paul says I owe the Gentile world a message because they're on the way to hell and I know the way to heaven. You have a debt, folks. And to whom much is given, much is...what?...required. He had an obligation, first of all, to God and it was his apostolic calling. And his debt was expressed in preaching the gospel to Greeks and barbarians.

And I really believe the phrases here, "Greeks and barbarians, wise and unwise" are parallel phrases. The Greeks were considered the wise and the barbarians the unwise. And he's really saying the educated and the uneducated. The Greeks were very sophisticated and when they knew the Greek language, of course, which was believed to be the language of the gods and all of that and the language of philosophy and wisdom and so forth. Now they thought they were really the elite, the educated. When a person came along and spoke another language, they had an unintelligible kind of sound, and the Greeks used to call their unintelligible chatter "bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar." And so foreigners became known as bar-barians. They were regarded as uncultured, uneducated and unintelligent.

Paul is saying I owe the same responsibility to the educated, the uneducated, the wise, the unwise, the cultured, the uncultured, the Greeks and the bar-barians. You know what he says there in that statement? You can't pick and choose who you want to preach the gospel to. It bothers me when I hear somebody say, "Well, you know, I'm trying to reach the elite." Oh? Why? Are they something better than the rest of us? Jesus said, "God is no respecter of...what?...persons."

Far and wide, Paul says I want to reach people. Have you ever remembered that the first person that Jesus ever revealed Himself to was a half-breed harlot living in the village of Sychar who had a handful of husbands and was living with a man who wasn't her husband? Nice lady. And to make matters worse, she was a Samaritan. But the gospel is always the great equalizer, isn't it? It's so easy to be trapped in being a respecter of persons. We tend to want to evangelize the high class and we let the rest of the people pass by. And so very often, the poor are more open, aren't they?

So, Paul had a thankful heart. He had a concerned heart, a willing heart, a submissive heart, a loving heart, a humble heart, a fruitful heart, and an obedient heart. He was going to fulfill his debt. And that's what faithfulness is all about, see. He would obey at any cost. On his way to Jerusalem, they

told him he was going to be imprisoned and all of that and he says, "I don't care. I'm going to finish what the Lord has given me to do," the twentieth chapter of Acts. And sometimes, folks, that's all you have to go on. You're going through struggles and you haven't seen all the joys and it's tough and all you've got is the bottom line of a debt to God. And I believe if you're faithful to discharge the debt, He'll fill your heart with joy.

Now, two final marks. Number nine and number ten, a pure heart and servant of God is characterized by an eager spirit...an eager spirit. And this wonderfully balances off the last point about discharging the debt. That is not to say that you do it reluctantly. There is an eagerness to fulfill that responsibility. And so in verse 15, this is lovely, he says, "So much as is in me." In other words, as much as I can muster inside myself, "I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome." That's an eager spirit. I'm ready. And the word is eager.

You know, in Acts 20:22, he said, "I go to Jerusalem bound in the spirit." It was as if somebody wrapped up his heart and dragged him into Jerusalem. He was compelled. It indicates a strong desire, Acts 20:22, bound in the spirit, a very strong desire. In fact, it's used in Romans 7:2 of a woman who is bound to her husband, strong binding, strong obligation. He says I am ready. My spirit is bound. And this is a good indication that Paul's self-preservation was not at the top of his priority list. His only concern was to fulfill the plan of God and the ministry got it given to him and really, that was everything he lived for. He says nothing moves me, in Acts 20, because I don't count my life dear unto myself. Paul's life was never ever ever the issue. In fact, he said, "For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain." He said in 2 Corinthians 5, "What's the difference if I die? If I'm absent from the body, I'm present with the Lord." His life was never the issue.

In Colossians chapter 1, I believe it's verse 24, he said, "I rejoice in my sufferings for you." In Philippians he said, "If I be offered on the sacrifice of your service...or rather...the sacrifice of your faith, I rejoice." If I lose my life reaching you, that's okay. So, he had an eager spirit.

Life had only one value to Paul. Think of this and look at your own life. This is a very hard thing to accept. Life had only one purpose. There was only one value in life to Paul and that was to do God's work...consumed by that. He was eager to preach. And there were others like him. I think of Philippians chapter 2 and it says in verse 27, "Of Epaphroditus, he was sick near unto death, but God had mercy on him and not on him only but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." Epaphroditus was working with Paul there and Paul says God was not only merciful to him to preserve his life, but merciful to me because my heart would have been broken. Because, "For the work of Christ he was near unto death, not regarding his life to fulfill your lack of service toward me." So Paul is saying in Romans 1:15, all that falls within my power, all that falls within my prerogative is ready. As far as I am concerned, I am eager to come to Rome to preach the gospel.

He's like a racehorse in the gate, banging against the steel, waiting for the thing to open. He's like a sprinter who gets in those blocks...and I can remember that feeling so well...and that guy puts his hand up and up goes the gun and you're just...and there's usually in a very important race somebody goes too soon and they have to restart. Paul was like a sprinter and God had to hold him back he was so ready to go.

Are you so eager? Is that the kind of service you render? Or does somebody have to get behind you and shove with all their might to get you involved? Does your wife have to give you the typical Sunday afternoon lecture to get you here Sunday night? To get you to the Flock group or the Bible study? Or are you eager? If it comes out of your heart, you're eager.

And, you know, it's amazing that he was as eager as he was because he knew what a volatile place Rome was. He knew they would despise him. He knew they would reject his message. He knew they hated Christ. And that brings us to the last final mark of a pure spirit, I call it a bold spirit...a bold spirit. Verse 16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

Paul, how can you be so eager to go Rome? I mean, you know they're up to their neck in emperor worship. You know they're steeped in paganism. You know that they despise the gospel of Jesus Christ. How can you be in such a hurry to go there? Aren't you intimidated about what's liable to happen?

No, I'm not ashamed. Oh, that's...that's such an important statement. Paul says when I get the opportunity to preach, I'll really preach.

It's amazing what shame does to us. Many people get real eager but when the battle starts, they faint. Remember John Mark, he started out, he was really hot for the missionary trip. He bailed out. Didn't want to confront it.

You know, there are what I call in the church "the sign-up specialists." They sign up for everything and drop out. You see the eagerness but they don't have that boldness, that unashamedness. The pagans in Rome branded Christianity as atheism. They even branded Christianity as cannibalism. They said that the Christians ate one another...and that was their communion service, talking about drinking blood and eating flesh. The Jews branded Christianity as heresy, blasphemy, lawlessness. The gospel was always a rock of offense and a stumbling block. But Paul said I don't care, I'm not ashamed of it, I am not ashamed.

He proved that in Jerusalem, didn't he? He proved it in Athens. And he would prove it in Rome. He proved it in every city he went to because it nearly cost him his life in every single town, but he never pulled a punch. The servant of the Lord is always going to face the situation in a unashamed, bold way.

May I just offer this thought? The great ones never compromise...or become ashamed, never. And that speaks to my own heart as well. Jeffrey Wilson wrote, "The unpopularity of a crucified Christ has prompted many to present a message which is more palatable to the unbeliever. But the removal of the offense of the cross always renders the message ineffective. An inoffensive gospel is an inoperative gospel. Thus--listen to this--Christianity is wounded most in the house of its friends." It's true. We have emasculated the gospel so it won't offend anybody.

I remember speaking at a youth rally and I preached on the need that young people had to be saved. And a lady who was the wife of the director of the rally came to me afterward and said, "You know, your message offended me because you preached as if all of these young people were evil." I said, "Well, I'm glad you got that out of it because that's exactly what I was saying."

"And you turned them off."

But, you see, that's the kind of mentality that so many people have. You compromise the message and you have an inoffensive yes and equally inoperative message. Unashamed boldness to speak for Christ.

How do you do in that score? Do you clam up? Do you kind of wiggle around the issues comfortably? Or do you confront it?

There was a great saint in the early church by the name of Basil. You can read about him. He was martyred in 363 A.D. and he was martyred by a man that became known as Julian the Apostate. Julian had restored into the Roman Empire heathen worship. You remember that Constantine, for the most part, had made Christianity the religion around 325. And when Julian came in, he brought back heathen worship. And Basil, who was a great Christian, went to him one day and this is what the historian said he said to the emperor. "Thou renegade, thou hast abdicated the throne prepared for thee in heaven. Verily I believe that Christ, whom thou has adjured, will take thee and pluck thee out of thy dwelling that thou mayest know how great is that God whom thou hast offended. Thou hast not fought of His judgments, nor venerated His altars, thou hast not kept His laws which thou didst declare often with thy lips. Wherefore, great emperor, Christ will not remember thee."

Emperors were not used to being talked to like that. Julian ordered Basil to prison. And this was the punishment. Every day the guards were to make seven leather thongs from strips pulled out of his skin. And so, every day they would cut long strips to make into thongs. This went on for weeks. Finally Basil picked up one of the thongs and asked to see the emperor. This was granted because the guards felt that he had prepared himself to deny the faith and affirm the place of the emperor.

And so, he was brought holding in his hand his own flesh, scarred all over his body and this, the historians record, is what he said, "Dumb, deaf and blind are thy idols, apostate. To me to live is Christ, to die is gain." And he threw the thong of his own flesh at Julian's feet. They carried him out and dropped him on a red-hot bed of iron spikes and he died.

Soon after, Julian himself died. And there are many records of his last words. He is said to have said this, "Thou hast conquered, O Man of Galilee." I'd say Basil was bold, wouldn't you? And I'd say his boldness got the message through.

Paul served with his spirit. What did that mean? That mean that he was bold and eager to preach out of a great debt to God and because he desired fruit and all of this was born out of a thankful, concerned, willing, submissive, loving, humble heart. He was unashamed. And if you find in your life shame for the gospel of Christ and if I find in my heart shame for the gospel of Christ, it just reminds us of how far we are away from the heart of true spiritual service.

William Lloyd Garrison wrote this: "I am aware that many object to the severity of my language. But is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, as uncompromising as justice. On this subject I do not wish to talk or think or write in moderation. No, no, tell a man who's house is on fire to give a moderate alarm, to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher. Tell a mother gradually to extricate her baby from the fire into which it has fallen. But urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I will not equivocate. I will not excuse. I will not retreat a single inch and I will be heard. The apathy of the people (he said) is enough to make every statue leap from its pedestal and hasten the resurrection of the dead," end quote. What zeal.

You know, I think that we haven't even seen what God could do in our city, our state and our country if we began to serve truly the way we've seen in Romans 1. We don't have everybody here, this is Memorial Day weekend. But just this group that's here could revolutionize the city if we served from our spirits in a worshipful whole-hearted service, if we serve with a spirit filled with thanksgiving, with concern, a willing spirit, a submissive spirit, a loving spirit, humble, fruitful, obedient, eager and bold. But we tend to get so comfortable, so lazy spiritually.

Well, I hope you thought about your own life and not somebody else's tonight. I know I thought about mine. And I kind of feel like the master picked up the brush and touched me up in a few places. But I've been touched up before and I tend to fade in the same spots, do you? Let's resolve tonight to restore the color and be used as Paul was.

Thank You, Father, for Your good word to us tonight in the heart and spirit of Paul. And now as we leave the introduction, and begin to enter the masterpiece of the theology of the gospel, may we do so with the same heart that Paul had so that we don't treat it as academics but as the only hope for

the salvation of lost men. Teach us more, Lord, that we may reach others. And may we serve You with our hearts, our whole hearts, not externally but from deep within.

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