

Fruit of the Gospel: Welcome One Another

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- [0 : 00] Well, as Jordan said, it's nothing much to do with welcoming one another in this passage, which is the title of the sermon for tonight.
- It's not quite that I've just had a whim and changed my mind. When Jordan mentioned that, there's a line in Monty Python, not Monty Python, Fawlty Towers, where the cook is drunk, I think, and so they make up an excuse for why the food's not on the table.
- And I think John Cleese says something like, the cook is brilliant, he just changes his mind all of a sudden. Menu's off, change menu. And it's not quite like that tonight. It's just that I decided to start halfway through the chapter, not at the beginning.
- And it's not really about welcoming. But you've listened to it. Let's pray. And let's pray that God speaks to us from the second half of Romans 15. God, our Father, speak to us from your word tonight.
- Help us to learn what Paul is writing about, why he's writing it. How it should impact upon our lives, how we ought to respond to this word. And we pray, Lord God, that your spirit will write it in our hearts, leading us to faithful obedience in service of you and in service of the gospel of your son.
- [1 : 12] And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, before coming to Doncaster, as some of you know, about 12 years ago nearly, I was in the UK.
- And I was there helping in a church while I was doing my PhD and teaching a little bit in a college there, in teaching the Bible, Old Testament. And one of my sort of tasks as a sort of honorary staff member, I guess, in the church that I was at, periodically was preaching and taking services.
- But each month, I would take the early morning service on a Sunday, which was the old language Book of Common Prayer in a very old church, about 800 or 900 years old.
- That is the building. And about 30 or 40 people would come. This was a wonderful British experience, because the people who came were a sort of cross-section of British eccentrics.
- They, to be honest, some of them literally, I think, were mad. There were retired colonels, literally, and a very strange group of people.
- [2 : 22] One person said to me after one service, and which part of the colonies are you from? And I felt like saying I came from Australia because I stole a loaf of bread. But I remember one day I was taking the service, and all the other staff were away at an ordination service at Gloucester Cathedral.
- And one of our staff members was being ordained priest. She had been a deacon for a while and was on our staff as a pastoral worker and was being ordained priest. And so in the intercessions, I prayed for Audrey, who was that morning being ordained priest.
- And one of the eccentric old ladies, who really was, to be honest, I must say, in the confines of this room, I'm sure nobody here will know her, and she's certainly not here, was the rudest lady, one of the rudest ladies I've ever met, shouted out in the middle of the intercessions, priestess!

I thought, oh goodness. To which somebody else, a man who I'd never met before, and never met again, I just happened to be a visitor, shouted out, priesthood of all believers, Calvin!

I thought, this is exciting. Here am I in the middle of intercessions in a early morning British church, book of common prayer. You'd expect people to be half asleep and very placid.

[3 : 40] I'm ending up, it's like a football match with people commenting. Well, it raises a sort of thorny old issue in a way. Is a minister of the gospel a priest?

And there are many of my colleagues and friends who object to the fact that the Anglican church still calls people like me priests, as though somehow that's too Catholic and too Old Testament.

You see, priests are people who offer sacrifices, and in the Old Testament, they're the ones who in a sense receive the animal and kill it, basically, in the offering of a sacrifice, along with the person who's making the offering, who might put their hands on it, etc.

And in the Catholic church, as it developed, under the Pope and into medieval times, the minister is called a priest. And the reason for that is because their doctrine of the Lord's Supper, when you've got your communion, your bread and your wine, is that they argue that this is a sacrifice, and you need a priest to offer this sacrifice of the Lord's Supper, as though somehow we're offering again the sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross.

Now, at the time of the Reformation, which is when the Church of England broke away from the authority of the Pope, along with the Church of the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church, and so on, through the various countries of Western Europe, though they rejected the, and rightly so, the Catholic doctrine of the Mass, that is the offering of bread and wine as a sacrifice, because somehow we're offering Jesus' sacrifice again, some of those churches, like the Anglican Church, kept the word priest.

[5 : 21] Part of the argument for that is that the word priest is related to the word presbyter, meaning elder, and not actually a sacrificial sort of mediator. Many evangelicals today, and often, me included, wish that they had changed the word in the Anglican Church to presbyter rather than to priest.

But actually, what we find in this passage is the one use of the term priest for an individual Christian minister of the Gospel, which is quite fascinating.

So there's something to whet your appetite, to keep you awake, as we go through this part of Romans 15. In this section, the second half of 15, Paul, in effect, has finished the bulk of his theological argument.

The letter he wrote to the Romans was not to explain how you are saved, so much as why you are saved, through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. And in particular, the theme of why you are saved is the mutual relationships of love and welcome between Christians, especially between Jews and Gentiles, a dominant theme through the whole of the letter to the Romans, that Jews and Gentiles are equal as sinners before God, and equally saved by the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

And therefore, they are to live in harmony with one another, welcoming one another, loving one another, which has been the key thrust of the argument of the preceding chapter and the beginning of chapter 15.

[6 : 46] Now Paul moves on as he begins to sort of wind up his letter, so to speak. He firstly reflects a little bit on his call to be an apostle. He reflects a little bit on his strategy as an apostle.

He declares then his plans for the future ministry, and then fourthly urges prayer for that ministry. And at the heart of this ministry, his strategy and asking for prayer is the fact that Paul regards himself as a priest, as I say, the only time in the New Testament where an individual other than the Lord Jesus Christ, I think, or Old Testament Jewish priests are mentioned as a priest, the only Christian minister of the gospel who's mentioned as a priest.

So Paul says in verse 14 and 15, as he reflects on his call to be an apostle, I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

Nevertheless, on some points I've written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God. Now, Paul regards the fact that he's an apostle as a gift from God.

It's a grace given to him from God. It doesn't stop him in shirking from boldness in declaring these things that he writes about. In particular, some of the boldness is tied to the issue of the Jew-Gentile relationships and the harmony that Jews and Gentiles as Christians are to have as brothers and sisters in Christ.

[8 : 23] But then he goes on in verse 16, as he speaks and reflects about his ministry as an apostle, that he was called by God or the grace was given to him by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Now, Paul is using Old Testament language here. And as an Old Testament priest would offer a sacrifice, Paul sees himself as a minister or apostle of the gospel as in effect offering a sacrifice to God.

His offering is the Gentiles. That was Paul's particular call to be an apostle. If you remember that blinding vision that he had on the road to Damascus when he was converted from being a Jew persecuting Christians to being a follower of Jesus, in particular, the ministry task to which he was later given was to be a minister to the Gentiles.

And so Paul has ministered to the Gentiles. And what he's saying is that there's a sense in which that ministry is like him offering to God a sacrifice of those Gentiles to whom he's ministered and who've come to Christian faith.

The means of sacrifice, of course, is not an altar. He's not putting people to death. It's not a bloody sacrifice. But rather, it's a sacrifice through the means of the gospel.

[9 : 52] By being a minister of the gospel, he's won converts from Gentiles to God. And they are, in a sense, his priestly offering to God. There's an element of mediation then.

Paul has mediated God's gospel to Gentiles to bring them to God. Now, they're striking words. They're striking words because in the Old Testament and in Judaism of Paul's day and beyond, Gentiles were unclean.

Gentiles would, if you had table fellowship with a Gentile at certain times, it would render you unclean for offerings or ceremonies or rites or sacrifices. Gentiles were prohibited from entering the temple courts of Jerusalem.

One reason, of course, why Paul is arrested in Acts 21. Wrongly, but arrested in Acts 21. Paul is saying here, in effect, that the gospel of Jesus Christ, more than anything in the Old Testament, cleanses and purifies even Gentiles to make them acceptable to God in Christ.

No longer a ritual cleansing, like Old Testament washing, but a cleansing that comes from the gospel concerning the Son of God. No longer for Jews alone, but for Gentiles too.

[11 : 13] And so Paul's ministry is priestly. And rightly so. For anyone who's ministering the gospel, it's actually right to see ourselves as priests. So when sometimes in debate within Anglican church circles about the language of priest and so on, I'm quite happy to accept the term, but on these terms.

That is, I'm a priest because I'm a preacher and minister of the gospel. Not because I have a Catholic doctrine of the Lord's Supper, but because the gospel makes me a mediator, trying to win people to God, people who are not yet believers in Jesus Christ.

The language here actually comes also from the very end of the prophet Isaiah, from Isaiah 66. They shall bring all your kindred from all the nations as an offering to the Lord.

And that's what, in effect, Paul is seeing himself and his ministry as partly fulfilling in the final vision of Isaiah. He sees himself as being an instrument of the gospel, a priest of the gospel, so that Gentiles from all the nations of the world are coming to God.

It's actually an Old Testament vision, in effect, that's fulfilled through Jesus Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ and the priestly ministers of that very same gospel.

[12 : 28] Now, it's true that the New Testament teaches us that all believers belonging to the church are a priesthood. It doesn't actually specifically teach that each Christian is a priest, but the church, the people of God together, it's a priesthood of all believers.

We as a church, we as part of the universal church, have priestly roles and ministry. That is, by being mediators of the gospel of God to the world in which we live.

We should not shrink back from that. It's not a sacrificial ministry in the sense of killing an animal or shedding blood, but in a mediatorial sense, it certainly is.

Like Paul, with an individual sense of being an apostle to the Gentiles, we as a church and we as part of the universal church are actually part, supposed to be part of that same gospel priestly ministry.

Now, there are two things about this ministry that Paul then mentions. He's not boasting in his own ministry. He says in verse 17 and 18, In Christ Jesus then, I have reason to boast of my work for God, for I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.

[13 : 50] Paul is saying there, it's actually not his achievement that he's offering a sacrifice of the Gentiles to God. That is, any convert from amongst the Gentiles through his ministry over the last however many years before he wrote this letter, is actually Christ's achievement.

It's Christ who's worked in him and through him. And that's actually what he's boasting in. And how Christ has worked in him and through him, he says, at the end of verse 18 and into verse 19, Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.

Word and deed. So his words as he's preached is backed up by his lifestyle, his deeds, his actions, his love. The word is essential, but the word is also essential in accompanying life that backs it up.

The power of signs and wonders, he mentions at the beginning of verse 19, often regarded as a particular aspect or characteristic of apostolic ministry in the early church.

Plenty of examples that we see in the Acts of the Apostles. Not that I think signs and wonders, personally, have totally ended, but certainly I think that there is a significant concentration of them in the beginning of the preaching of the gospel after the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 21] All of that is by the power of the Spirit of God. That is, conversion is not a human work done by our word or our deed or our signs or wonders, but is done by God's powerful Spirit working in the hearts and minds of people to bring them to faith and repentance.

We should not see here any sense of tension between the word of God and the Spirit of God, something that the New Testament keeps together.

The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. So as Paul preaches, he did so, trusting the powerful Spirit of God to take the word and make it fruitful in the lives and hearts and minds of those to whom he preaches.

So there's something of Paul's reflection on his ministry. He's reflecting on his ministry to Gentiles. He's written this treatise, this letter, out of that ministry, out of that apostleship as a minister to the Gentiles.

But he's written it also to show the unity that should be there between Jew and Gentile. Paul himself, of course, was a Jew and he sees his own unity with his Gentile brothers and sisters and wants that to be expressed in the full amongst Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile Christians.

[16 : 35] Having reflected a little bit on his ministry, he now reflects a little bit on the strategy of his ministry in the verses that follow. If you remember when Jesus, before he ascended to heaven, after his resurrection, gave the great commission to go to the ends of the earth, from Jerusalem to Samaria to the ends of the earth, in effect, at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, for example.

Well, to that command, as well as to his own specific commission, Paul has been faithful. It's not quite the end of his life here, but we're getting towards it.

Paul's written this letter in 57, 58 AD, most likely. Probably put to death in Rome in the 60s. He's got a few more years ahead of him before he gets to Rome.

If you read the end of the Acts of the Apostles, we're two-thirds of the way through Acts, I suppose, when this letter's written. That sort of period of time. To date, he says in verse 19 that he's preached the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum.

Illyricum is in modern-day Albania, Yugoslavia sort of area. We're not actually told in the Acts of the Apostles that Paul went that far. He may not have physically gone that far, though he may have done.

[17 : 50] Or it may be that through his ministry in places like Berea or Thessalonica or in Athens or Corinth, he's preached to people and seen people converted who've come from there.

So, in effect, the strength or length of his ministry goes that far. We're not certain exactly to what he refers there. Paul's strategy, then, comes following that.

He's talked about the extent of his ministry. Paul's a church planter.

He doesn't want to go where other people have started churches. There's too much of a pagan world for that. He wants to go where nobody's heard of the gospel, starting afresh.

And the strategy we see of Paul through the Acts of the Apostles shows that. He goes to places where the church has not yet been founded. He goes to strategic places.

[19 : 01] He doesn't necessarily preach in every little village, but he goes to the significant trade or capital centers of areas. In particular, a good example is Ephesus, where he spent quite a deal of time.

Corinth is another example. Athens, Thessalonica, Philippi. They're all key places because they're places where all the surrounding area would come in, would trade, would do their dealings, and then go back to their villages.

So, if you were to try and put it into a Victorian modern context, he would have come to Melbourne. He probably wouldn't have based himself at Healesville, for example.

Not wanting to put down Healesville, but it's just full of strange animals. You'd want to be in a place where people would come, where you've got major impact. So, those who would hear you and, under God, converted, will then go back to their own places and become themselves ministers of the gospel spread around.

Paul thought strategically about where to reach the most people, where to be the most effective in his ministry. And so, in reflecting on his ministry in Ephesus, which is in western Turkey in the province as it was then called of Asia Minor, Paul in Acts 19 speaks of all of Asia has heard the gospel.

[20 : 16] He doesn't mean every single individual, but he means people from all the areas of Asia Minor, simply because Paul in Ephesus has preached the gospel. And that's what he's reflecting on here.

He picks new places and strategic places to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The strategy of reaching unreached people groups is actually not insignificant even today.

And though most people groups in the world, I think most, have had the gospel at some point, there still remain many others who largely have not heard the gospel. It's why we support the Mitchell family in the former Soviet Union, in an area which is largely unreached for the gospel.

It's why CMS and other mission societies send people to these sorts of places. But thinking strategically, it's why in the last 10 or 15 years, an organization like CMS, the Church Missionary Society, which we support significantly with a number of missionaries, is trying to think where are the strategic places to send people to be gospel ministers and missionaries.

So, Andrew and Helen in the Middle East, in a significant city, trying to reach a significant group of people. CMS keeps sending people, of all places, to places like Italy and France, because trying to reach the universities of what are basically pagan countries and pagan cities.

[21 : 37] And think of the leadership of the world that goes through key universities in Western Europe. And so university ministry is so significant. It's why we're prepared to support AFES through Andy Pridot at Melbourne University, because university ministry has a particular strategy.

Not that those people are worth more than others who are not at university, but through those sorts of contacts and conversions, gospel ministry may actually spread further, deeper, more widely in significant ways in our society.

So thinking strategically about ministry is certainly something that we at Holy Trinity try to do in our own area, and try to think what are the ways in which we should be staffing our church, seeing in particular, I guess, a strategy amongst Chinese people in the last nine years here, and more recently in Chinese youth and young adults and students.

And so for those who are Holy Trinity members, as part of our budget, we're pushing our budget this year so that we can fund more staffing and ministry for Chinese students and young adults, where our local area, sort of Doncaster Box Hill, has huge numbers of people who are fresh from China in their late teens and early 20s who've never heard of Jesus Christ.

So that sort of strategy ought to be part of how, even as individuals, we think about what is the right thing, the best thing, the most strategic thing that I, as a Christian, ought to be doing in my life, with my life, for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 11] And Paul's strategy is reflected again in the verses that follow. In verse 22, this is the reason that I've so often been hindered from coming to you. Now he's writing to Rome. He's not been to Rome at this point.

He wants to go to Rome. Who doesn't? But he's not gone there because there's more, a bigger strategy involved. That's why he's been hindered from going. But now he says in verse 23, oh, he's reflecting on the fact that the church in Rome was begun by somebody else.

In fact, we know there were Christians in Rome by 49 AD. There were big riots in Rome in 49. And Christians, along with Jews, were expelled from Rome in that year. So someone else had taken the gospel to Rome.

That's nine or so years before Paul writes this letter, presumably some years before that. There's a Christian church there. Paul doesn't want to start on somebody else's work. He's writing to these Roman Christians to encourage them.

But he's not going to go there and sort of stand all over somebody else's work. There are more important strategic places for him to go. But having said that, he's reflecting in effect that the gospel's now gone to the eastern part of the empire.

[24 : 24] What we would say today is Greece and Turkey, as well as Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and possibly a little bit north of Greece into Albania, Yugoslavia.

The gospel's gone to those key centers, is what Paul is saying. And so therefore, as he thinks and reflects, well, where is God leading me to now as part of my fulfillment of the gospel commission to go to the ends of the world?

And so he says in verse 23, but now with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain.

I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you once I've enjoyed your company for a little while. Spain, presumably, is unreached at this time, and Paul feels that God is leading him there, to the very western end of the Roman Empire.

To do that, he would go through Rome, but for a little while, to have mutual encouragement with the believers there, but not to plant a church, not to treadle over somebody else's work, but simply, in a sense, passing through, on his way to an unreached and strategic area.

[25 : 35] Spain, it seems, is where he's set his mind to. We're not sure that he ever got there, to Spain. Some who argue that he did. There's a later letter, not in the Bible, but written at the end of the first century, that some suggest, reads, that Paul may have gone to Spain.

We don't really know. At the end of Acts, Paul's in prison in Rome. We're not sure whether he ever got beyond Rome, or whether, in the end, his imprisonment in Rome was the end of his life, in effect, before the tradition has it that Paul was martyred in Rome in the 60s under Nero the emperor.

He goes on to say, about this going to Spain, that he's gathering, it seems, financial support, probably from them in Rome, where it says, once I've enjoyed your company for a little while, at the end of verse 24, probably has a sense of trying to gain their support for a ministry to non-Christians in Spain.

And that's certainly how Paul has operated through the Acts of the Apostles and in his letters. That is, he expects believers in other places to help fund ministry to places where there are not Christians, as well as Paul working to fund himself as a tent maker.

He doesn't expect to arrive in a pagan place and charge non-believers for his livelihood as he preaches the gospel. But for Christians, he expects them to fund mission in other places.

[27 : 08] And that, of course, ought to be a significant part of our own Christian stewardship and giving as well. So that's part of Paul's strategy. Unreached places, strategic places.

Now he moves on to talk about his immediate plans, in a sense by way of information, for those to whom he writes in Rome. Before he goes to Rome, en route to Spain, Paul has got another task to do.

He's going to go to Jerusalem, and that's where he's headed as he writes this letter to the Romans. The reason he's headed to Jerusalem is to take a collection of money from Christians in Macedonia and Achaia, that is in Greece, from the Athens area and further north, Philippi, Thessalonica area.

And he's collected that money to take it to poor Christians in Jerusalem. So he says in verse 25 and 6, However, I'm going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints, for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things.

[28 : 28] So from the churches in Philippi and Athens, and maybe some others as well, Paul has taken up a collection. It's for poor Christians in Jerusalem, the bulk of whom would be Jewish Christians, and the bulk of those who've given this collection are Gentile Christians.

We know that there was a famine in Jerusalem in the late 40s AD. We're now a few years after that. And we know that there's periodic persecution in Jerusalem as well.

Why does Paul go out of his way with this money? Why doesn't he give it to somebody else, to a church warden or a Christian traveler, and say, well, look, you're going to Jerusalem, you take it, so I can get off to Spain more quickly.

Jerusalem's the opposite direction. This collection's actually very important. Not just an act of money, and more than an act of compassion.

This collection, that we actually hear a little bit about in other parts of the New Testament, is a highly significant act of Christian love, of Christian fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

[29 : 39] And that's been a significant theme in this letter. So this is a tangible, in a sense, fruit of the letter that Paul is writing to the Romans. It's an expression of the love and unity that we saw last week he demanded of his readers from Romans chapter 14.

The word for share is a strong word, a word for fellowship. The Greek word is *koinonia*. It's partnership. Paul is actually expressing physically, by taking this money, the Jewish Christian, Gentile Christian partnership, unity and love that the gospel brings.

The key theme of the letter to the Romans actually demonstrated in this act of bringing money to Jerusalem. Note that these Gentile Christians were pleased to give.

He stresses that in verses 26 and 27. Christian giving is to be a delight. These are people giving to people whom they don't know personally. So ignorance of the people directly is no excuse not to give and not to give generously.

God, of course, loves a cheerful giver. Someone once instructed me, how do you make a cheerful giver? If you're not cheerful when you give, there's a collection coming up later, so here's being preparation for you.

[30 : 57] If you're not cheerful when you give, give a bit more. If that doesn't make you cheerful, give a bit more. And if that doesn't make you cheerful, give lots more. And in the end, you might give so much that you're laughing out loud when you give.

Well, it's worth thinking about because you're not going to be any more cheerful giving less. Let's face it and let's be honest. It's not only a joy, it's also a duty.

So don't sort of fool yourself or deceive yourself and think, well, I just feel this is a duty to give my collection, so therefore I shouldn't give because God loves a cheerful giver. We should still give out of duty in addition, giving with joy.

And delight. The duty comes, in particular here, because Gentiles have received the gospel through the Jews, in effect.

Paul's argument in Romans 9 to 11. And therefore, there is a sense of spiritual indebtedness back to the Jews. And that is part of their duty to give to Jewish Christians who are poor.

[31 : 59] So beyond Jerusalem, Paul says, I will come to Rome on my way to Spain. So he says in verses 28 and 29, So when I've completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I'll set out by way of you to Spain.

And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. So Paul's reflected on his ministry, his ministry strategy, his immediate plans, and now he asks finally for prayer.

He asks for prayer because prayer is essential, even for the super leaders or the apostles, as Paul himself was an apostle. He says in verse 30, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf.

Wrestling in prayer. Not a quick little prayer, kneeling at the end of your bed at night or something like that. This is serious business, this prayer. It's wrestling in prayer. And two things he asks for.

Firstly, rescue from unbelievers in verse 31. In Judea, that is. The Jewish authorities who are not believers. Paul's going, he knows, in a sense, to enemy territory.

[33 : 14] Not enemies being Jewish Christians, but the Jews who are not Christians. Paul was one of them, was converted, and now there's enmity between them. And if you read the Acts of the Apostles in the latter chapters, we realize why Paul had justification to not be afraid so much as to anticipate the enmity that would meet him when he went there.

From Acts 21 to the end of Acts. But his prayer is answered because we know from the Acts of the Apostles that Paul's life was spared there. He wasn't put to death in Judea.

In fact, his arrest led, of course, to his being taken to Rome as a Roman citizen to go on trial in Rome. The second thing he asked prayer for comes at the second part of verse 31.

And that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints. That is, he's praying that the Jewish Christians will welcome with thankfulness and gratitude the gifts of the Gentile Christians from Macedonia and from Achaia.

That is, he knows that the Gentile Christians have acted rightly in response to the gospel with love and generosity and he's praying that the Jewish Christians will respond rightly with love and generosity and acceptance, receiving the gifts given by these Gentile Christians whom they don't know.

[34 : 39] Paul, you see, is still anxious for Jewish Gentile Christian unity. Something that we've seen dominating the theme of chapter 14 last week in particular.

And so that's why he prays. We don't know, there's no record in Acts of how these Jewish Christians received the collection that was given to them. Well, beyond Jerusalem, Paul then mentions again in verse 32, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

God's will for Paul was to go to Rome, not as he expected as a prisoner, which is how he ended up there at the end of the Acts of the Apostles. And as I say, we don't know if he ever ended up in Spain.

Note in effect there that the prayer that Paul asks for is prayer that God's will be done. Prayer is not trying to twist God's arm that my will or Paul's will be done, but rather prayer that God's will be done.

It's God's will that Jew and Gentile Christian do love each other, do have relationship with each other, fellowship with each other, give for the benefit of others. Paul's prayer is that God's will is done.

[35 : 52] And he concludes the chapter as if he was almost including the letter with a prayer of blessing, a benediction of peace. The God of peace be with all of you.

Amen. It's a priestly Jewish blessing actually, such a prayer for peace. Maybe Paul is picking up the thought that he's a priest of the gospel. He prays for peace because that is the key fruit of the gospel.

If you remember back to Romans 5, therefore we have peace. Peace is what the Roman church needed, it seems. Peace between Jewish believers and Gentile believers.

Peace because bringing together Jew and Gentile in Christ is the fruit of the gospel. And Paul says, peace be with all of you. Amen.