

Missionary Letter

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 15. We will pray, but I'll leave that, I think, I'll just swap things around a little. So Romans chapter 15, we're coming to the end of Romans, and chapter 15 is really in the context of chapters 12, 13, and 14, and 15 are all really one section, and chapter 16 is really the final greetings. So, you know, Paul could really be saying at this point, as I was saying, and continuing.

So we're going to pick it up in verse 1 of Romans 15. I'll just give you a brief reminder of who we've been. So Romans 12 is really about converted to worship God. Romans 13 is about living under authorities, civil authorities, judges, police officers, and the like. Romans chapter 14 were issues of the strong and the weak, and how do you live in a church where people hold different views than you do over diet and calendar, over baptism, communion, over a whole number of things that are different in the church today in the world. And there's a huge list. Romans chapter 15 picks up on where chapter 14 finishes. So now hear God's word. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up. For Christ did not please himself. But as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. For whatever was written in the former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy, as it is written. Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing to your name. And again it is said, rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people. And again, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let the peoples extol him. And again, Isaiah says, the root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles. In him will the Gentiles hope. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. But on some points, I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus. Then I have no reason to be proud of my work for God, for I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, to bring the Gentiles to obedience by word and deed, by the power and signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Achilleum, I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ. And thus, I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation. But as it is written, those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you. Once I have enjoyed your company for a while, at present, however, I am going to Jerusalem, bringing aid to the saints from Macedonia and Achaia, have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

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

[5 : 28] When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of blessing of Christ. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from unbelievers, from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. Well, may God bless the reading of his word to our hearts and, of course, the message upon it. We're going to stand and sing. We'll then come back and pray and then come to the word. 15. Father God, we would pray simply that you would enlighten our minds with your truth, your word, with a view of our heart being changed. Father, we recognize that you have given us a new heart in

Christ Jesus, that we are a new person in Christ Jesus, but we recognize that as we live this temporal life, that so much of the flesh continues. Father, we would ask that as we come to your word, that we would be able to put you first, that we would be able to serve you and obey you in word and deed as Christ did, and that includes coming and worshiping you this evening. Father, I ask that as I proclaim your word, I do so as one with fear of you, but know that I am loved by you. I pray, Father, as we hear your word together, that we recognize who you are and what you have done, that you are the good and gracious God, the triune God of scripture, the one who lives and breathes now and is present with us.

Father, we submit now to your word and we call, we pray that by the person and work and power of your Holy Spirit, that you would make known the truth of your word into our hearts and into our minds and into our lives as we live them for you. Father, grant us great grace as we come to your word this evening and grant us great grace as we fellowship with one another also. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. Well, there are, let me say by way of introduction, there are different ways of addressing an issue.

I can remember in my English comprehension class, Mr. Matthews was his name. He lived in a nice little village and I only found that out once I'd left school and was down that way and someone coming out of his front door. But he used to say this, always put the most important thing in the first part of the sentence so that everybody knows what you're talking about. And I thought that's a pretty good rule of thumb, but there are other ways of doing it. Well, it's taken till Romans chapter 15, really, to understand why Paul is writing. Paul does explain to us at the very beginning of the letter why he's writing, that it is the power of the gospel. He's going to explain something. But here in Romans chapter 15, you begin to realize that Romans is actually a missionary letter. I wonder if you understood that as you heard it read or read it yourself, that Romans, the whole of Romans is actually a missionary letter. Now you're thinking, well, it doesn't look much like the missionary letters that we have today or the missionary blogs. You know, isn't it funny how Christians in service, not necessarily pastors, because we don't have to write those kind of letters, but missionaries overseas that are not necessarily supported by one or two churches, but sort of go off on their own, have a way of writing missionary letters of asking for money without actually asking for money. It puts them in a very difficult position because they have to be supported to do the things that they are called for by God. But anybody self-appointed can find themselves self-appointed into a position where there is no support for that. It's not seen as God's calling upon them by a church. That's incredibly important. Isn't it? Incredibly important that you don't just take yourself off, but that you are sent by a church. And the reason for that is, is because at some point, you're going to be in the position where you're going to need financial aid to be able to continue the work. Paul is an apostle, not just a missionary. And therefore, this letter is, this is why, one of the reasons why this letter doesn't look like an ordinary missionary letter, is because he is an apostle called by God, sent by God, supported by churches. And Paul has a right as an apostle to speak truth, doctrine into every single church. Now, of course, apostles don't exist today.

[11 : 15] They don't need to because we have God's word. But of course, what happens then is churches still need to be instructed, just like us here this evening. So even though Paul is writing to the church at Rome, and you think, well, that only seems to apply to them, we can think again and recognize that it actually does apply to us. So remember this. As we read through Romans 15, remember that it is a missionary letter. Remember that it is a missionary of an apostle, a letter of an apostle, but one of a missionary. Paul has great plans of where he wants to go and what he wants to do, God willing. And this is how it unfolds. In chapter one, he says, I want to come and see you. And then here in chapter 15, he's saying verses 22 through to 24, I want to come and see you. But before I come to see you, I want to go to Jerusalem. And the reason I want to go to Jerusalem is because there are churches in Macedonia and

Ica that have been very good. They've been helping the poor. They've been very supportive, verse 25. But then he also states to them that once he's been with them in Rome for a while, he doesn't want to stay there. He wants to go to Spain. And the reason he wants to go to Spain is because he doesn't want to build on another man's foundation. In other words, he doesn't want to come to Rome and stay there because there's already a church in Rome. Why stay there? He wants to go to a place where there is no church. And so the reason he wants to go to Spain is because he lays out here, he's not the type of minister to build on another man's foundation. I find that deeply challenging, especially considering that within a mile radius of this church, there are eight.

Perhaps somebody's not listening to Paul. It's interesting, isn't it, that Paul says, right, there's a church there. It's going well. Yeah, I've had to speak to you boldly on a couple of few issues, but now I'm going to move off into an area that doesn't have a church. Why? Because the issue is not building churches for the sake of building churches. It's actually spreading the gospel. That's why this letter is not about a church building project. It's actually about a missionary project, the project or purpose of God. He says to them in Romans 1 that he is praying for them, but here in chapter 15, verses 30 and 32, he says, can you pray for me? It's not a tit-for-tat relationship. It's simply to say, look, this is the mission that I'm engaged in. I'm praying for you as a church. Can you please pray for me in return for my missionary endeavors? He speaks very highly of the church. You'll notice verse 14. Here is a church that is full of goodness.

Full of goodness. Imagine describing a church as full of goodness. What else does he say about them? He says that they're filled with all knowledge, able to instruct one another.

Wow, I mean, that's an incredible testimony for a church. Full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to instruct one another. But then he says this, oh, and by the way, I recognize over their period, over our relationship, I've had a step on a few toes. I recognize at some point I've had to have been a little bit bold. I've had a little, been a little bit sort of harder than usual just to get my point across. And I do this by way of reminder.

[14 : 52] And I think it's really interesting that he puts this in the context of a reminder rather than instruction. And here's why. When Paul says to them in verse 15 of chapter 15, it's some points I've had a step on your toes. In other words, at some points I've had to speak just that little bit more boldly to you. I have done this as by way of reminder. In other words, here's a church that's already received the instruction. In fact, they're able to instruct one another. But that's not good enough. It's no good if you know the lesson and then don't remember to carry the lesson out.

Paul tells them that he's had to speak boldly to them in the context of reminding them. I want you to think about that for a moment. This is in the context of reminding them. Not in the context of instruction, as though you're doing it wrong, this is how to do it right. But rather reminding them.

I don't know about you that as a pastor, I think you can get tired of telling the same person, perhaps as a parent, perhaps as anybody, when you have to tell one person the same thing over and over and over again. You know, this is tiring. Have you not got it yet? Well, you're able to make a distinction as Paul is here that there's a big difference between receiving instruction and receiving a reminder.

Children only need telling once. What they need is reminding all the time. Okay? They need instructing once, but they need reminding all the time. Even in the church, we need only instructing once. As Paul says, you're able to instruct one another, but we need reminding all the time. I want you to think about it this way. The carpenter who sands a rough piece of timber in order to make a beautiful chair, sands the same piece of wood over and over and over again.

Okay? But that's how you get the beautiful chair. You get the beautiful chair through the constant, doing the same thing over and over and over again. Paul recognizes that if he doesn't remind this church, if he doesn't apply another coat of sanding and then another coat of varnish and another coat of varnish and more and more and more, you're never going to get to a beautiful state. Okay? So he recognizes, right, you don't need telling again because you've been told. What you need now is reminding. You don't need instructing all over again, but what you need is reminding all over again. So the general rule is this, that people only need telling once. That people only need instructing once, but what they need is reminding all the time. This is why, especially with children and parents, they can end up in that battle. Yeah, you've told me.

[17 : 50] I know what to do. Well, yeah, I know you know what to do because I told you, but you're not doing it. Okay? I'm not instructing you. I'm reminding you. And we can understand that tension. We think that if someone's reminding us, they're telling us to do it all over again. No, they're doing no such thing. They're reminding us to do it. And that's Paul's message here to this church. At some points where I've had to have been bold, it's been in the areas where I'm having to remind you. Now, why do people have to be reminded? Why don't you think about that? Why do people have to be reminded? Now, we know in the Old Testament that forgetting the commands of God is a sin. We know that when God has commanded certain things to be believed, certain things to be done, certain things not to be done, that you can't go as a way to avoid God's judgment on you, I forgot. Children do it all the time. Okay? They come in and they think, I forgot is a good reason for avoiding any form of punishment at all. I forgot. Well, I forgot is a sin. I forgot is a sin, especially in the Christian context, when you're dealing with God and his word to us. It's not an acceptable excuse to come to God and say, I forgot. Okay? We might, we might, but it is a sin to forget, especially when the command is to remember. So, if you've been commanded to remember and you are forgetting, then you are disobeying the command. Now, I understand that this plays into a part of general forgetfulness, but that's not what I'm talking about, and that's clearly not what Scripture is talking about.

Here, we need to be reminded. Why? Because God's commands matter. God's purposes matter. God's promises matter. They make a difference. They make a difference to you personally, and they make a difference to us as a church together. So, let me summarize, as we get into this chapter here, where we've come from in chapters 12, 13, and 14. Chapter 12 is about maturity, but maturity in the context of Christian worship. When God converts a person, he converts them from being a false worshiper of idols to a true worshiper of God. That's conversion. That's the gospel. That's what the gospel achieves in a person's life. Okay? You're either a false worshiper or a true worshiper, and true worshipers are simply converted people. They are people who come to worship the triune God of Scripture in God's ways. That's one level of maturity. The second area of maturity is chapter 13, where we understand that we live under the authority of God, but then so do judges, so do police officers.

We have to live under their authority, not because they tell us to. Okay? I don't need to do what the policeman tells me to do out on the street because he tells me. I just don't need to do that. I do, however, need to do what he tells me to do because God tells me. Okay? I need to obey the policeman, not because he tells me to, but because God tells me to. And that's what it means to have a proper understanding of levels of authority. That's what it means to have a proper understanding of who's actually in charge. Why do we actually do what we do? I don't do it because the judge says. I don't do it because the police officer says. I do it because God says, obey the judge, obey the police officer.

Okay? That is an important distinction because without it, you then mess up the levels of authority that God has instituted, even within the church. Okay? There are different levels of authority within the church, but not different levels of acceptability before God. Okay? We're all the same, but we have different responsibilities, and with different responsibilities flow different authorities. Okay?

Those who take responsibility, authority flows to them. Okay? That means that I don't have any authority at all, none, simply by being a pastor. The elders have no authority by being an elder.

[22 : 20] They can't get it that way. You can only get authority by taking responsibility. And authority flows to those who take responsibility. So the most authoritative men and women in this church will be those who take the most responsibility. They're the ones who can have the most say, and they're the ones who can speak with a great deal of authority because they're doing it, because they are in it, because they are taking the responsibility. That's very important. Chapter 14, then, is matters of indifferences, diet and calendar, baptism and communion, morning service or evening service. The list is endless as to what it should be.

Should women wear hats or not wear hats in church? Are they allowed to wear trousers or skirts only? What is it going to be? Are we allowed to turn up in trainers? Should we wear a tie or not a tie?

Should we brush our hair on the left or to the right? Well, believe it or not, to some people, these things really matter. And these things, though not essentially gospel things, can cause great division in the church. And so Paul is having to say, understand the issues, understand the issues of someone living their life out of God's word and someone living their life out of a good conscience.

And there's a big difference between the two. The weaker brother in Romans 14 is clearly the one who lives out of conscience compared to the stronger brother who lives out of conscience, but who lives out of God's word as well. So the illustration that we used was the one of drink because it's, I think, the most appropriate one, especially without being, you know, I think we can just be honest, especially with the government passing a new law on tax for alcohol, that drink is a big issue in Scotland. So I think to pick on this issue, it would be a good one, even within the church.

And here's why. So I don't drink because I choose not to, but I'm free to drink. Okay. I wouldn't, I wouldn't be offending God if I drunk some alcohol, wine or anything else, but I wouldn't offend God if I chose not to drink alcohol. Now, if I got drunk, which is God willing, I pray never happens, but if someone in the church got drunk, could they offend and damage a brother or sister in the faith?

[24 : 52] Yeah, they could, they could damage them greatly. And that, that has, that has happened. But Paul goes on to say that even by drinking and not getting drunk, you can still damage another brother.

So bear that in mind. Bear that in mind also. Paul expects those who are strong to be able to go out of their way when they're in the presence of the weak. Okay. When you're in the presence of the weak, you live with your neighbor's conscience in mind. You live with your brother's conscience in mind.

You live with your sister's conscience in mind. And you don't do anything to damage the one for whom Christ has died. And that's the benchmark. Is what I am doing, is what I believe, is the view that I hold at the expense of damaging another brother or sister for whom Christ has died? That's the issue. Okay.

So forget every other issue surrounding it. When you get to the very nub of it, the issue is very simple. Is what I believe, is what I do, where I go, damaging, damaging the one for whom Christ has died?

Now we come into chapter 15. He picks it up. Let those who are strong bear with the failings of the weak. But the issue is the same. Maturity. Everyone is to become mature. And this is expected in areas of worship, in authority, in areas of fellowship, and now in areas of ministry. And the reason I say that is because chapter 15 clearly points out that we ought to be like Christ, who doesn't please himself.

[26 : 34] Christ is put forward as a person, God the Son, chapter 15, verse 3, who doesn't please himself. He just doesn't do that. He pleases the Father, and by pleasing the Father, he pleases us. He gives us great pleasure in the blessings that we have. But he doesn't live his life to please himself.

He lives his life to please the Father. He is a servant of God for the glory of God. And that takes huge levels of maturity. In other words, we all need to grow up, and some of us need to grow up pretty quickly. Pretty quickly. Okay, there are levels at which you would expect certain people to be at certain levels at certain times. This idea of we're all on our own journey, God changes us.

Okay, that's true to a point. Okay, but you can't blame God for your lack of spiritual growth. You can't blame God for committing the same sin over and over again, simply by saying, this is the journey God's got me on. You know, why does God get the blame? It doesn't seem right, and it's not right. So I understand, I understand the argument, but it's all down to God. Yeah, but it's not a case of let go and let God. You know, as Keswick Ministries famously, you know, I mean, that's what Keswick Ministries are known for, isn't it? Let go and let God, which is a, you know, terrible heresy, really. And that's not the issue. The issue here is that we are to work compatibly with the Holy Spirit as you put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, but you're involved. So we can't say, well, my life is what it is because this is where God has got me. Well, if that's true, then it must also be true that all the things that you lack is down to God as well. And it doesn't make sense.

So grow up, Paul's saying. He's saying in a very nice way, he is said in verse 15, I've had a step on a few toes, but in a very nice way, he's basically telling us to grow up. In other words, Christian maturity needs to be there because it is more important than service. Okay, let me say that again. Christian service is not the same as Christian maturity. Okay, I want to say it one more time. Christian service is not the same as Christian maturity. Christian maturity will lead you to serving. Okay, but Christian maturity will lead you to serving like Jesus. You can serve without ever being mature. And that's part and parcel of some of the problems because there's so much emphasis put on, look how much I've done over the years. Look at what I've done. But that's not the benchmark. The benchmark is not years of service. The benchmark is maturity. The benchmark is not even, look how much I'm doing now. Now, maturity leads to serving God now. So there must be an element of maturity there because you serve God. But the benchmark isn't your service, how much you can kick out for God in a day. It's how mature you are, how much you are actually growing and becoming complete in Christ. I'll give you a few examples of this. Here in verse 14, this church is full of goodness. They're filled with all knowledge. They're able to instruct one another. I mean, that's worth writing home about. But Paul is describing this church as that way. Now, a Christian can serve in one church for many, many years, a number of years, and even be on the verge of bragging about it.

Perhaps as a deacon, perhaps as an elder, perhaps as a Sunday school leader, without ever maturing. And I think one of the tests of Christian maturity is when the person no longer holds the position.

[30 : 46] And are they still around? Because there's the maturity. I once met a person who said that they were a Sunday school leader.

I said, well, how long have you done that for? Oh, it's been about 11 years. I said, oh, that's tremendous that you've done it for 11 years. We went on, we're discussing other things, and then it came up about prayer and Bible study.

I said, I've never gone to them. And you're a Sunday school leader? And you're responsible for teaching children the gospel?

Do you see the problem there? Or is it just me? Do you see how it is possible to serve without ever becoming mature? And I've seen it time and time again, where people serve, and it looks like maturity, until they no longer have that position, either through retiring from the position, or simply stepping down due to ill health, or a number of other things.

And then when they're better, they're gone. Never to be seen. Often their own thing. What is that? It's not maturity, is it?

[32 : 06] It was simply service hiding immaturity. You think about that. Service hiding immaturity.

God wants us to be mature, and the reason he wants us to be mature is because mission must be done by mature people. Because ministry must be undertaken by mature people.

Not by people who serve, but by people who are mature. And the reason for that is because it takes a certain kind of maturity to be able to be discerning, dare I say, in our house group books, between the trellis and the vine.

And only a few people seem to be able to tell the difference. So the unfolding of the gospel in the church is how God creates unity. It's how God creates proper worship in his church, and how God conforms us to be like Jesus by any means necessary.

God chooses whatever he decides to choose to make us like Jesus by any means necessary. In fact, even in Romans 8, if you remember, the Spirit has to take our prayers, which we think are correct, and then re-jig them so that when they actually get to God, we are actually praying what we ought to be praying if we only knew that we ought to be praying them in the first place.

[33 : 35] Okay? The Spirit prays the prayers that we should be praying if only we knew that we needed to pray them. The trouble is, our immaturity means we don't. Okay? We let ourselves down in our immature state, but God, in his gracious condition towards us, never lets us down.

Never lets us down. So, having summarized, let's move this on to the ministry of mission. Mission, Paul says, this is a missionary letter, the center of God's mission is about the glory of God.

Do you remember the catechism? Question one, what is the chief end of man? In other words, what are you for? What has God made you for? Remember the answer? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Okay? To enjoy him, to glorify God and enjoy him forever. That's your purpose. That's the reason why God made you. That's the reason why God created you.

And that's the reason why a church exists. And here's the thing. The only people who get to see that, the only people who get to understand that, verse 21, look at it with me.

[34 : 55] Those who have never been told will see him, and those who have never heard will understand. The only people who get to understand that are people who are saved.

God transforms us from a false worshipper of stuff, from a false worshipper of things, to become the true worshipper of him. That's the purpose of the gospel.

And that's the purpose of all Christian ministry. In fact, if your ministry does not seek that end, then ditch the ministry.

If the ministry you're involved in does not seek the glory of God in it, don't do it anymore. You're wasting time, and precious time, at that.

The reason we do what we do, listen to Paul in verse 16, Paul explains himself in the work of ministry as a priest. I'm a priest in the service of the gospel.

[36 : 02] What do priests do? They offer to God gifts. What's the gift? Verse 16. So that by the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

This is how Paul imagines his ministry. He says, I'm a priest in the order of the gospel. I go out into the world to proclaim the gospel. The moment a person becomes converted, I then offer their life to God as a holy and acceptable offering because now they are in Christ.

That's exactly what they have become. My whole ministry, my whole mission is simply to go out into the world and recognize they don't need saving because they're going to hell.

They need saving because God deserves to be worshipped. And that's a total different motivation. You will be much more motivated to share the gospel when you are motivated by God's glory.

You will be much more motivated to share the gospel when you have got it in your head, in your heart, that God deserves to be worshipped. But if you don't have that and you think hell is scary and people are going there, that is not the same kind or even the same power of motivation for people to be saved.

[37 : 18] The reason people are saved is not to stop them from going to hell, but it's so that they would become a true worshipper of God and as a by-product, they don't go to hell.

The motivation is not keeping them out of hell, the motivation is bringing them to God. There's a big difference between the two. Do you think it's the difference between true repentance and simply saying sorry to avoid the consequence?

You understand the difference, don't you? Suddenly, you're put on the naughty step. As I look up this evening, I'd imagine that most of you are not ever put on the naughty step anymore, although we could perhaps practice that in our church, you know, as the pastor and people, you know, could be a disciplined thing.

But imagine it, you know, it's easy, you know, I'm sorry. You're not truly sorry, you're saying sorry to avoid what's coming next. You're saying sorry so as not to get what's coming to you.

Now, repentance is a real turning to God, isn't it? That you're not turning away from hell because you don't want to go there, but you're turning to God because you want to go to Him, and that's totally different.

[38 : 41] I hope you can understand that. The motivation, that the actual, what the desire of the person's heart is completely different. One doesn't want to go to hell, the other actually wants God. They're not the same.

And what Paul is saying here is that I'm a minister of the gospel because God deserves to be worshipped. He's not even thinking about whether or not people deserve to go to hell.

That's not even on his mind about stopping people from going there. What's on Paul's mind is God deserves to be worshipped by those people, and they're not true worshippers.

And so he takes the gospel to them. That's the motivation, and that's what we see here. False worshippers becoming true worshippers through the power of the gospel, the power that Paul explained back in chapter one.

The purpose of the gospel then is to bring disobedient people to become obedient to God by word and deed. It's to take disobedient people in the world and to make them obedient people to God forever.

[39 : 51] And Paul says, I'm not going to lay this foundation where there's a foundation already been laid. I'm not going to build on another man's work. I'm going to go somewhere where it's unreached. I'm not going to be reached. Do you know, I could take you to certain places in Wales where 150 years ago, or maybe more, the village would be 50, 60, maybe perhaps even 70% Christian.

Someone at some point had evangelized, churches had been built, people were going to church, and within a generation and a half or so, you can now walk into those villages, and the church is carpet warehouse.

And no one's saved. So 150 years ago, you would walk there and go, I'm not going to build another man's foundation. But now you'd have to walk in and go, an area that was once reached has now become unreached.

And that's the way the gospel goes throughout the world. You think of some of the churches that Paul writes to here, are they still around today? No, the gospel spreads, it moves, it shapes, it shifts throughout the world.

And what once was a reached area can become an unreached area 200 years later. And you have to do it all over again. Because there's a whole new generation that needs to hear the gospel.

[41 : 12] The only difference is, is now there's an old church building there before there was nothing. And the reason for doing it, the reason for reaching out into people, into those areas, is because God deserves to be worshipped.

So finally, and with this we'll wrap it up. The partnership of ministry. One of the reasons why Paul wants to go to Jerusalem before he comes to Rome, is because of the truth of partnership.

Gospel ministry means that we are partners with one another. It's an issue of giving and receiving verses 26 and 27. And this is interesting, if you read it carefully, Paul says that because the Gentiles have received a spiritual blessing, they ought in light of their spiritual blessing now be able to give materially.

In other words, often Christians have wanted to put a clear distinction between, a carnal distinction perhaps, between the spiritual and the material. As if this is spiritual and that's material.

But Paul doesn't do that. He doesn't make a division where there is no division. What Paul says is this, that when a person is benefited spiritually, they ought then to be a benefit to others materially.

[42 : 28] In fact, if you look at the early church in the beginning of Acts, it tells us very clearly that everyone sold what they had and gave it to the poor. Think about it.

Everyone sold what they had. No one considered what they had was their own, but common to all men. And we don't think like that anymore. That's a real shame. And it's not socialism.

It's not socialism. It's Christianity. Because there's a much deeper level here. So Paul understands that if you've received the spiritual blessings of God, that should affect your materials.

In other words, you're now able to help others who need the help. So Paul's going around these churches. He understands that they have been a blessing to him. They have been a blessing to the poor. And they've been a blessing simply because they've received the gospel.

That I will now serve somebody else as Christ has served me. That though he was rich, he became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich. Suddenly, I don't consider material well-being as a condition of great importance anymore.

[43 : 36] Now it becomes an issue of how much of this stuff can I give away? Because I just don't need it. Now I understand we live at a different time and a different culture and so it takes a little bit of discernment to be able to figure out what to do.

But generally speaking, the principle holds true. Gospel partnership doesn't just affect us spiritually, it affects us materially.

And what we do with the materials that we have. Money, wealth, clothes, houses, buildings, cars, everything. What do we do with all that?

Stuff. Stuff. There is no division in partnership. At least true partnership, there is no division.

There's also a partnership you'll notice in prayer. Paul gets towards the end, verse 30, he asks, he's told them that he has prayed for them and now he asks them for prayers, verse 30.

[44 : 38] Partnering with others in prayer for the ministry work of God. Why? Here's why. God's kingdom is about one thing, righteousness.

That God, when God looks at you, he wants one thing out of you. He wants you to become one thing and that's righteous. Yeah. You think that, that if you, I don't want to put this across in a very blunt way, but I want to be fairly honest, that God will provide for you by giving you the ability to provide for yourself.

Generally speaking. There are general rules like that. Now you might want to pray to God, should I take this job or that job? But God's already answered the question. By the abilities that he's given you, by the place where he has put you, by the desires that he has given you, the thing that he really wants you to be concerned with is your own righteousness.

He wants you to be righteous. He wants you to understand that the kingdom of God is coming and it's a kingdom of righteousness, not of material things, not of what job you'll have or what degree you'll have or what competition you will win or qualification you'll have before he returns.

I mean, I've often wondered when I was young, saying things like, Lord, don't come back yet because I want to do this first. And I grow up and think, how stupid was I?

[46 : 04] And yet suddenly I get older and I meet Christians the same age who are saying, don't come back yet. I want to get married first. Don't come back yet because I want that first. Don't come back yet.

It should be, don't come back yet because my brother's not saved. Come quickly, come. But so often we can get the kingdom completely messed up because we're so concentrated on our little tiny speck of importance.

To God, we are incredibly important, but we manage to reduce that to the little things that we do. And yet the reason why you're important to God is because he's made you righteous in Christ Jesus.

And that's what the kingdom's about. So in conclusion, we are the partner. We are a partnership. We are a family. In fact, it's interesting how the Bible describes membership more in terms of partnership than it does in terms of membership, as in a membership certificate and then you can go wherever you like.

Right? Like people with a tennis club certificate or a golf club certificate. You know, you can buy a golf club membership for a whole year and never play golf and still be a member.

[47 : 23] Why do people treat the church in the same way? I mean, is it not God we're dealing with? One wonders what people are thinking in such decisions that they make.

I wonder. So Paul says, live in light of the future. Live in light of the mission of God. Gospel mission is about a disobedient people becoming obedient.

And I want to put this in the context of Philippians also. Over in Philippians, he says this, which is brilliant sarcasm coming from an apostle. And we all love a dry sense of humour or at least some of us do.

But this is brilliant. This is what he says. He says to the church, you ought to press on. You ought to press on to the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Press on. Don't think about anything else but that. And then he says this, those who are mature think this way. And if any of you thinks otherwise, God will reveal it to you.

[48 : 31] And I think that's brilliant. Because this is what he's saying. If any of you think like me, you're right. But if any of you don't, then God will bring it to your attention.

I mean, is that sarcasm or what? But that's what he says. And only a mature person could get away with saying that. Only someone who's truly got their mind and heart fixed on the mission of God could get to the position where they can actually say, no, it's not about that.

You're wrong. And if you think that, you're wrong. This is how you should think. And if you don't think like that, I am confident that God will bring it to your attention.

That's Christian maturity. It's a maturity, not service. And it's maturity not found in all service, but should be found in all service.

So gospel ministry comes through here in Romans. But gospel maturity, the maturity that comes from the gospel, equally comes through.

[49 : 36] And that's the issue here. Maturity and mission is the focus. It takes a certain kind of maturity to be involved in gospel ministry.

And it takes a certain kind of maturity to understand that gospel ministry is the purpose of the church. Okay? A certain kind of maturity to understand that gospel ministry is the purpose of the church.

And it takes a certain type of maturity for you to be involved in that ministry in the first place. And we will do well as a church if we remember that this Wednesday evening.

If we come to our meeting with Romans 15 burning in our mind and clear in our heart. And I pray God to God that that will happen.

Amen. Remind us what you have called us for and remind us who we are in you. Be with us now and forevermore in Jesus' name.

[50 : 36] Amen. Amen.