

THE CHURCH WHICH SATISFIED AN APOSTLE

Romans 15:14–33

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Romans 15:14–33. We know, as we've been going through Romans, that the doctrinal part of Romans is now at an end. For the rest of the chapter, 15, and on through chapter 16, Paul is going to be relating personal information, sending greetings to the Roman believers, and closing with benediction.

This church to which he writes has been in existence some twenty-five years. Perhaps shortly after the Day of Pentecost, because there are persons in Jerusalem from Rome, it is maybe they that began this church. Paul had never had a chance to visit, personally, this church. He did not know the majority of the church, although he knew a few within it. He has written to give them an understanding of who he is and what gospel it is that he preaches. It's clear, as we read this passage today, that a motivation that Paul had in mind for writing the Roman letter was, when he arrived in Rome, to sufficiently provide advance knowledge of himself. That he could use the Roman church as a base from which to go on to further missionary journey into Spain.

Prior to this time, Paul has used the church in Antioch as a missionary base. After every missionary trip, he had returned to Antioch. Now he wanted to go far to the west. Antioch was just too far away now, perhaps, to be a base. Many who read this chapter in Romans say what Paul has in mind is the establishing of a base from which a new frontier of missionary activity could begin.

With that in mind, we read Paul saying, "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God,

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sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation. Rather, as it is written: ‘Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.’ This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen” (Romans 15:14–33, NIV).

As I have studied this passage, I have sought to ask the question, “What are the marks in a great church?” A church whom Paul could identify as one which satisfies his heart. I would like in this

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message to pull out three things especially, which evidently satisfied the heart of an apostle about a church. Realizing that there are so many things more that could be said about what really satisfies an apostle, or what really satisfies the Lord. But we're confining ourselves to this particular passage, and what it is that brings satisfaction to the apostle.

I. For this Roman church is a church that satisfies him in the sense that it carries a good recommendation.

He says, "I myself am satisfied about you." That means that he has some knowledge of the church. His knowledge would not have been a firsthand knowledge. He had not been there. So what he'd heard about the Roman church had come through others. And whatever he had heard about that church had been of sufficient strength to lead him to the conclusion that here was a spiritually mature church, a good church. A church that, when he wrote this letter, would have tremendous appreciation for what was being said and would be in agreement with what had been declared.

I think about how much satisfaction it caused me, as a pastor of this church, to once talk to a particular person in this fellowship and say, "How was it that you came to this church?" They said, "We were recommended by Jack Hayford, The Church on the Way." I thought how unique that is. I had never met Jack Hayford. In fact, the first time I had the opportunity to meet him was last Saturday. I said, "We're on back-to-back on television a lot, but I've never had the chance to meet you in person." It was a joy to meet him.

But the reputation that had come out from this Body was such a pastor in another area could say, "If you're looking for a home church in the area in which you live, here is one of the churches that you should consider," and ours was there. I praise the Lord that the church can carry a recommendation. I understand, here, what Paul is saying about this church.

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Sometimes a church cannot carry a very high recommendation. It may be deficient in doctrine like the Galatian churches. If Paul were talking to someone who was moving to Galatia, he would have to say, “Link up with a church there, but beware. There are a lot of Judaizers in that church, and they’re going to be out to pervert doctrine and substitute works for grace.” If he were counseling somebody that was moving to the Corinthian church, he’d say, “That’s an exciting church. A wide-open church. But they’ve got problems. They’ve got a lot of divisions. Just be careful. And remember not to look to people, but to keep your eyes on the Lord.” That’s what you say to somebody when you’re going into a situation you’re not quite sure of: “Get your eyes off people.” We always have to do that anyway.

Recommendations to Galatia or to Corinth would have had to carry qualifications. Maybe in these areas, what some modern bard has said would be true: “There are occasions when the Church is like Noah’s Ark. If it weren’t for the storm on the outside, you couldn’t stand the smell within.” The Church is a safe place to be, the body of Christ.

This church comes fully recommended. Paul is able to say of it that it is full of goodness. That it’s full of knowledge, and that the people in it are able to instruct one another. Just a pause on each of those descriptive characteristics for a moment.

A. Here is a church full of goodness. Think of that word “good” as it relates to a single individual like Barnabas in the Scripture, who is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith. Here is a church full of people like Barnabas. Persons who sincerely love God and who love others, where there is not any degree of pretentiousness. And there’s not a manipulation of other people. These are people who have come into the goodness of Christ and are experiencing a healthy development of a life of Christ in their midst.

I happened to recently to be at a seminar which featured the use of the Taylor-Johnson temperament analysis test in pastoral counseling. Taylor-Johnson had devised a test—some of

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you have taken it—that determines whether or not you have a healthy temperament. There are some eight different indicators that emerge once you've taken the test. Some polarities in personality.

After I'd taken the test myself, some days later I got to thinking, "I wonder how the Lord would score on this test?" Then I said, "I wonder how the devil would score on this test?" So based on what I knew about the Lord and what I knew about the devil, I proceeded to take the test for each of them.

Without going into all the polarities of psychological temperament on the Johnson-Taylor test, just to indicate some of them. They're looking for, are you a sympathetic person, or are you an indifferent person? Are you a dominant person, or are you a submissive person? Are you a hostile person, or are you tolerant? Are you self-disciplined, or are you impulsive? There is kind of a proper mix. It's not an either/or. There's balance in each one of these.

The Lord inevitably scored right in the center of a healthy personality, as I thought He would. Sure enough, the Lord turns out to be as the Gospels present Him. A person who is right on sympathetically. Who has the proper relationship of dominance to submissiveness. He knows when to be dominant and when to be submissive. He can serve others. He also is Lord. He has the right degree of hostility against wrong. But is tolerant toward people. He is very self-disciplined. But not to an unhealthy state. Some people are so self-disciplined, it becomes unhealthy.

The devil was another picture, however. He was indifferent to people. Dominant. Hostile, but impulsive. When you get those kinds of traits of personality working, you'd better lock him up real quick. Or get them to immediate psychiatric help.

I thought, in the body of Christ, how it is true that in terms of our temperament, as we become more and more exposed to the Lord Jesus Christ and the ministry of His Spirit and the ministry

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of the Word, we begin taking on the personality characteristics of our Lord. So that rather than reflecting the evil one who is in the world—who is knocking loose and is indifferent toward people, dominant and hostile and impulsive—we have One who teaches us to be full of goodness. Jesus says that, “The good person, out of his treasure, brings forth good. And the evil person, out of his treasure, brings forth evil.”

Here is the Roman church—I believe, like this church—that was filled with people who were on the way to emotional, spiritual, and mental health. Never having a sense of “Here is a church that had arrived.” But rather, a church that certainly was on the way. A great commendation.

Yet while this church was on the way to being full of goodness, as Paul indicates, it was a church where people who weren’t full of goodness could feel right at home. I really believe that that’s a characteristic of a healthy church. A healthy church is one composed of persons who are growing in the Lord and very open and transparent to people, who come in and who are hurting, and who need the transforming work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The only army in the world that kills its wounded is the Christian army. I’m talking about people in the church who really have a disaster, fail spiritually. The tendency of an unhealthy church would be to immediately isolate that person and cloister them off, rather than seeking to bring them back into the fold, caring for the sheep. Part of being filled with goodness is not killing the wounded in the army.

B. Paul can say this church is recommended not only because it’s full of goodness, but it’s full of knowledge. That is to say, it is a knowledge that is related to the knowledge of Jesus, the knowledge of the Scriptures. At this time, of course, the New Testament had not yet been written. So the Scriptures they would have been knowledgeable of would be in the Old Testament. The thing that really strikes me about that church, therefore, is that within it, as you look at it, it does not need to import persons to give it doctrine or special emphasis. That there

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appears to be emerging, from its own ranks, an ability to know and interpret the Scripture faithfully and rightly. It is a sound church in respect to its knowledge.

C. And Paul indicates it is a church that comes recommended, in that believers within it are able to instruct one another. It was not just the leaders who knew the Scripture. But it was the ministry of believers. There was a spiritual maturity throughout the whole church which kept this church from being excessively dependent upon any one leader. Goodness leads to knowledge, and knowledge leads to the ability or the competence to instruct one another. Yet with all of this, Paul is able to say—and notice how tactful the Apostle Paul is—he says, “You come recommended to me.” In verse 15 he says, “On some points I have written to you rather boldly to put before you a way of reminder.”

The certain sign of a person who becomes full of knowledge is the willingness to hear a re-emphasis of those great truths of the faith that will stir it up to continue in the pattern which they began with. Maybe there were some things within the Roman church which Paul had heard of which were not as good as they ought to be. Like the question of eating meats and keeping days. It appears to be one of those things in which he wrote to them rather boldly. But he is assured, as he thinks of this church’s recommendation to him, that here is a church who is willing to receive reminders.

If you’re a believer who basically knows the fundamental doctrines of the church, don’t feel, in a sense, guilty that you don’t know enough. That could be a good thing or a bad thing. It can be a bad thing if they compulsively drive themselves so that they’re not confident in what they already have. It can be a good thing if they maintain a teachable spirit, recognizing that they already have a fundamental grasp of the essentials of the faith.

Here is a church which has a fundamental grasp of the essentials. But on some areas it needs to be reminded. And indeed, when we worship together, I think a great part of worship, especially,

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is the preaching of the Word. My task is not to give you, so much, new information as it is to put before you what, in many ways, you already know. And to make it clear and practical and applicable once again to your life.

I, for example, know some things that are rather subtle conclusions. I know that God is with me in trial and will always work the good in the trial. But while I know that, there are times when I need to be freshly reminded of it. I recall a time when I stepped into a worship service, and the minister was speaking exactly about this very topic. He told this story which pricked up my ears because it was about Enterprise, Alabama, which is a little town not too far away from where my wife was born and grew up. In the early 1920s, Enterprise was infested with the boll weevil plague. It was a one-crop economy kind of town. For years, the boll weevil came increasingly so that it wiped out the cotton crop in the town. The town was on the edge of disaster. They said, “We can’t grow cotton any more because of the boll weevil.” So they turned and began to plant a variety of other things. All of a sudden, because of going to diversified farming they began to enjoy a new kind of prosperity. A prosperity that was not dependent any more on a one-crop product. The town became so prosperous that, by the time of the late twenties or early thirties, they had erected a monument to the boll weevil. They said on that monument, “Erected in honor of the boll weevil, who is responsible for our present prosperity.” The minister said, “Have you looked at the plague in your life, and are you ready to erect a monument to that plague?”

Romans 8:28 is certainly a Scripture that tells us God’s working all things for the good. There are moments when we need to be reminded. Paul is saying, “This is the kind of spirit and tenor of the Roman church.” A church that comes recommended—full of goodness, full of knowledge, full of ability to instruct one another.

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II. I think another quality which is present in this church which makes it so easy for the apostle to write to it is the fact that he knew that they were interested in him and in his plans as an apostle.

They understood the crucial nature of an apostle's ministry. They were ready to listen to the heartbeat which he had for the world, and which Christ had for the world. It is an apostle's task to establish the church where it has not been established before. That, by the way, is why you'll never have an apostle pastoring this church. Apostles don't pastor churches that exist. Apostles are ones sent forth to break ground in new areas. I believe there are persons who have apostolic ministries today. We may not call them "apostles." We may call them missionaries, in some cases. But persons who are bringing the gospel to a new area and establishing the church in that area for the first time.

Paul sees that this church is interested in the missions expansion of the Church. So he shares with the church the details concerning his labor. It's a fascinating review which he brings. It's not a review of boasting at all. But a review which honestly sets forth what God had done through him. Paul here shows a profound understanding of what his mission really was. He says that he has thought of his mission as a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, in the priestly service of God. There's some technical words he uses in the language in which he writes.

The word which he uses for "minister of Christ Jesus" is different from the common word used in the New Testament for minister, *diakonos*—servant, or deacon. Instead, it is a technical word, *leitourgos*. It is used in the Old Testament and the New Testament, especially to refer to those who were involved in priestly service. Paul understood his ministry as one which was a priestly service to Jesus Christ, to present to Him Gentiles at the altar, a sacrifice.

I was reading William Barclay's commentary on the Book of Romans. He gave an interesting background of this word, *leitourgos*. Words have historical meanings. Let me just share this with

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you. In ancient Greece, there were certain duties in the state one could do for the state, which were called “liturgies”. This is the first time the word was used. We use it now in the worship service—a liturgy. But a liturgy was, first of all, a duty that was done to the state. It could be voluntary or, in some places, required. Barclay says there were five voluntary services that a citizen of the state could do that would be called a liturgy. He could, for example, put up some money to sponsor some dramatic choirs for the plays. Or he could sponsor an athletic team. This was especially important in combating other towns. And we know the importance of the Olympics. Like, someone who would sponsor the Olympics for Los Angeles would be called a *leitourgos*. Or a person giving a duty to the state, a liturgy to the state, could sponsor a feast for some state occasion—provide the banquet, the meal. Or even, he could sponsor a diplomatic mission to another town. Or he could sponsor a warship’s expenses for a whole year. In these ways, he could serve the state.

Gradually, the word “liturgy” changed from a service to the state to service to God. But its use here by Paul shows sense that he had a mission of being someone else’s sponsor. He was the sponsor of persons who had never heard the gospel. It was the free outgiving of his life that made it possible for them to be present upon the altar. Here he thinks of Old Testament sacrifice, and he sees himself as a priest of God—not offering an animal, but as presenting to God the Gentiles. And they were going to be an offering, he says, made holy by the Holy Spirit.

Of course, in the Old Testament an offering had to be clean. A distinction was made between clean and unclean. For any person who was a Judaizer in the church that said that Jews only could be saved and everybody else has to become like a Jew in order to be a Christian, Paul is saying, “Don’t be hung up by the Gentiles uncleanness. It’s the Holy Spirit that makes them clean and acceptable.”

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That kind of a comment, then, puts a real glint in my own service to Christ to make me say, “Is my service to the Lord one of sponsorship of others?” And can I say this of myself and you say it of yourself—that you’re sponsoring others to the Lord Jesus Christ, maybe even sponsoring members of your own family? Making it possible, through your love and through your worship and through your witness, for them to come to know the Lord.

As the Apostle Paul has taken the Gentiles into his arms and offered them to God, he has a noble sense of purpose. And with this noble sense of purpose, he has a vast extent of planning that has gone on in his mind. There are some believers who say, “Don’t plan ahead. Just live a day at a time, and don’t make any long-range plans.” I find that that viewpoint is not buttressed by the example of the Apostle Paul. For as he looks back upon what he has done, he says that he has been able to evangelize beginning in Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum. What he’s done is kind of gone in an arc, all the way from Jerusalem to what would now be modern Yugoslavia. He has planted the church in all of these areas, so he says there is no longer any work remaining to be done in any of those areas.

That is an incredible statement. I have ridden a train through part of that area—thirty hours, just on a train. Let alone thinking of riding a horse, or walking, or riding an ancient ship, as Paul would have had to have done. Yet, he says, “In all this area now, my work is done.” This doesn’t mean that he’s been to every town in all of those areas. But he has seen his ministry as being a catalyst. Whenever the church has been brought into being, it’s been a church that could produce missionaries that could go out into the outlying areas. He’s just hit the key centers. That work is now done, and he says, “It’s time for me to go on to Spain.” And so he goes.

Paul, as he approaches the age of sixty-five, is not thinking about hanging up his mantle and saying, “My ministry is done.” There are new vistas and new frontiers. I think a tragic thing

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happens in our own Christian life if we ever reach the point where we feel like it's over. And there's nothing more to do. And we've accomplished it all.

I was reading a little brochure called "Western Theology." In this, he compares two kinds of theologies which are present in the Church: settler theology and pioneer theology. The settler theology is the group of people who finally, out in the west, got the safety of their town. They're behind their stockade, and they've got security. The drama of the trail is over. They have arrived. Now safely quartered within their town, it is time to settle down and build and enjoy the fruits of having been on the trail. They want a settled experience. They're looking no longer at the future so much as just being happy that they'd had something dramatic happen to them which had gotten them there in the first place.

In contrast to the settlers are the pioneers, who are still out blazing new trails and living with the rugged nature of the frontier. They view life as a wild, fantastic, explosive gift, while the settlers see life as a possession to be carefully guarded. The settlers feel that they have arrived, and the pioneers feel that they haven't.

Given these two kinds of theologies, look at what happens in the respective, various components that fit into the town. Look at the church, for example. In settler theology, the church is the courthouse. It's the massive structure that sits in the center of the town, where all the records are kept, and where you check in once in a while for some important things like birth, marriage, and death. It's where the records are kept. It's sort of the custodian of whatever.

But in pioneer theology, the church is a covered wagon. It isn't all that beautiful. It is marked and scarred with arrows. It's bandaged with baling wire. And it moves into the future. It does not bother to glorify its ruts.

In settler theology, God is the Mayor. He sits in an overstuffed chair with the blinds drawn. He is predictable and always on schedule. The settlers look to Him to meet the payroll. And peace and

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quiet are His main concerns. But the big thing is predictability—always on schedule. Nothing unusual ever happens in the town.

But with pioneer theology, God is seen as the Trail Boss, rough and rugged, who lives and sleeps with His people on the trail. He often gets down in the mud and helps them push their wagon along. He slugs the pioneers when they get stopped. His fist is the expression of His concern.

In settler theology, Jesus is the Sheriff. His goal is to enforce the rules. He wants to make sure that nobody steps out of line. He's there with the handcuffs and a gun to put you in jail if you step out of line.

But in pioneer theology, He is the Scout who rides ahead and finds out where the pioneers should go. He has suffered every hardship of the trail.

In settler theology, the Christian is the settler who fears the unknown. His main concern is to stay in good with the Mayor and to keep out of the Sheriff's way. His courthouse is the symbol of law and order.

For the pioneer, his goal is adventure, new life, the challenge of being on the trail and following the Trail Boss, who is out blazing new paths ahead.

The clergy in settler theology is the banker. He is the establishment. He's like old bankers, very suspicious of strangers. But in pioneer theology, the clergy is the cook, who serves up the meals to help the pioneers follow the Trail Boss in the covered wagon.

I think Paul is a pioneer. I think his understanding of the Church is one that would have us to be never a group of people that feels like God's mission for us has now been completed. We have so many particular people in a building at one time, and, therefore, God's job for us is done.

God is on the move in the world, and He's on the move in our community. He's on the move in our church. Our task is to see where His heart is leading us, and to follow Him. And to be interested and concerned about where He's leading others.

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This church at Rome does not have this selfish sort of an attitude that can so easily emerge in a church, which is just concerned about what God is doing about me and mine. But it has this beautiful concern for the world and what God is doing in other places.

So the Apostle Paul knows that here's a church that shares his heartbeat for the world and sees the mission of the Church as one which is never done in the world. But he also knows that this church would be interested in what's happening with the saints. So he shares that heartbeat, too. He's going to Jerusalem, he says, to present an offering for the saints. It's an offering which he has collected in Macedonia and Achaia from the churches founded there. This is an important moment for him to come back to minister to the poor in Jerusalem. He presents this rather unique viewpoint—that those which have prospered spiritually from what has been the faith of the Jerusalem Jews should now materially benefit them in return. In this act of offering, he is attempting to weld another tie between these two different parts of the Church. His hope for unity is really striking.

This has been a concern of ours within this local body as well—that we see Christ's Body as one. Not divided into different camps, but one Church in the world.

III. Paul's third thing, which he can really be satisfied about this Roman church on, is here is a church that can be counted upon to pray.

Verses 30–33 find Paul appealing to this church to pray. The word which he uses for “strive with me in prayer,” is a word which, in the Greek, is “to agonize.” It comes across the same in the English. It means the same thing. To agonize with me in prayer. Strive together with me. It is not the sort of a prayer of, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And bless the Apostle Paul tonight, too, whatever he's doing. Amen.” But it is the kind of prayer which earnestly asks God, with the apostle, that certain things might happen. Paul has essentially two things which he wants the Roman church to pray with him about. That he might be, on the one

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hand, delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. And secondly, that his service might be acceptable to the saints.

We'll talk about the second one first. Why would it be important that his service be acceptable to the saints? After all, he's bringing a big offering to the Jerusalem saints. Why would he have to worry about his service being acceptable?

I think there were those in the Jerusalem church who were so suspicious of the Gentiles that they might call Paul, when he showed up, the Santa Claus theologian. That is, the person who comes to buy our confidence with gifts. With money. It's a ploy to get us to embrace the Gentiles.

There might have been a purist somewhere in the church that says, "Let's not accept their money. They have to become good Jews like us first." Paul says, "Don't let there be any tension like this. Pray with me that this offering will be received in the spirit of which it is given. That it will truly be a unifying instrument in the Church and bless the poor in Jerusalem." Sure enough, in Acts 21:17 we see that his prayer was answered, when Luke says, "When we [that is, Paul and Luke and others] had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." That prayer was answered.

What about the first prayer? That he might be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. That prayer was answered, but in a most unusual way. Certainly not one which Paul would have envisioned. For when Paul gets to Jerusalem, he is arrested. He's kept in prison for two years. Following that, he has a delivery as a Roman prisoner to Rome on a ship that wrecks in the Mediterranean after drifting for two weeks without compass or stars. It's kind of an unusual way for a prayer to be answered.

I think sometimes when we look to the Lord for answers to prayer, we need to give God the freedom to answer in the way that He chooses to answer. Paul was praying for an overall direction in his life. To be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. But he couldn't call the shots

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as to how God was going to do that. We strive together for someone in prayer. I'm sure that when the Roman believers got the word that Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem and was now sitting in a jail in Syria for a couple of years, they might have had the tendency to say, "God, how come You didn't answer our prayer?"

God, I think, was answering that prayer. But He was answering it in an usual way. He was doing some things in Paul's personality in those years which would make him able to understand that God is with us in the rough circumstances of life, which would make him live out what he said in Romans 8:28. He wrote Romans 8:28 before he had his prison experience. He said, "God works all things for the good." Now for three years, he'd have the chance to see that happen in his experience. Sure enough, God would. For shortly ahead, this Roman church with the Neronian persecution, where the emperor turned against them and began crucifying them to crosses and pouring oil over them and burning them at night to illuminate his gardens. It would be out of the Apostle Paul's life of saying, "God is with us in every circumstance," and the messages which would come from that life in imprisonment, that this life of the apostle's would be a blessing. They were called upon to strive with him in prayer. The prayer was answered in an unusual way. I suppose if I were to take this and apply it to our own congregation, I would boil down my requests on behalf of this congregation for our ministry as a church and my ministry to two: to pray, on the one hand, that this Body would be a base of ministry from which the Lord will work to establish His church and local churches in this whole coastal area. That's kind of been a dream for eight years. We have seen firstfruits. With God helping us, we're going to see more. But it's not going to be something that's going to happen unless we strive together in prayer, really have one heart and one mind on this subject. God's not called us to settle down in a comfortable building with a certain number of people and say, "This is the church." He's not called us to be settlers, but pioneers. He has work for us to do, and He calls us to do it. That would certainly be

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one thing I would unite my heart with yours in appealing to you as Paul did to the Roman church.

The second prayer on my heart is that the needs of the saints would be met. Those needs are, at times, financial. At times, they may be needs which are emotional. At times, they may be physical. At times, and I think one of the greatest needs, is the need to love one another, to be part of a Body of people that really cares for each other. I pray, and I ask you, to strive with me in prayer that the needs of the saints will be met.

Here's a church that satisfies the apostle's heart. I can, without any reservation, say that what Paul said of the Roman church I'm glad I can say of this body as well, my attitude toward it. Although I'm not an apostle by any means. You bear a good recommendation, and it's because of Christ's work in us. And you have a concern for the heartbeat of Jesus in the world. Your response to missions, your response to what we've sought to do as the Lord leads us in starting a new church and what our goals are, what our attitude is toward people. Your response has been tremendous. And you strive together in prayer. So as we come near the end of this Roman letter, let me take a moment to commend you, even as Paul commended this church.

Closing Prayer

I'm always conscious, Lord Jesus, as we share in a meeting like this that there may be some here who say, "But Pastor, that doesn't describe me. I wouldn't come with good recommendation. I haven't shown a concern for the apostle's heartbeat, or for the Lord's, and I really haven't striven in prayer." We think, Lord, to that Scripture that we are to confess one to another. There have been areas where all of us have failed in these counts. But Lord, it's not Your purpose to let us go away from here feeling condemned and weak. But You bring us to this Scripture today that we might be strengthened in our life. That it might be, on the one hand, an encouragement for those who have really walked in this way in which the Scriptures talk, and in incentive to others

THE CHURCH WHICH SATISFIED AN APOSTLE

Romans 15:14–33

to now begin and let the ministry of the Holy Spirit really overrule their life. So as we have shared this morning, I know, Lord Jesus, that Your Holy Spirit has been at work. In Your own way, You have put Your stamp upon every heart here. We do pray for one another. That not only as a corporate body could we be strong. But each of us, as individuals in this room, would be strong in You. We just lift our heart to You, Lord, in this moment, thankful that You love all of us. You know us all by name. And we praise You today. In Jesus' Name. Amen.