

CHAPTER 15

The apostle, in this chapter, continues the discourse of the former, concerning mutual forbearance in indifferent things; and so draws towards a conclusion of the epistle. Where such differences of apprehension, and consequently distances of affection, are among Christians, there is need of precept upon precept, line upon line, to allay the heat, and to beget a better temper. The apostle, being desirous to drive the nail home, as a nail in a sure place, follows his blow, unwilling to leave the subject till he has some hopes of prevailing, to which end he orders the cause before them and fills his mouth with the most pressing arguments. We may observe, in this chapter,

- I. His precepts to them.
- II. His prayers for them.
- III. His apology for writing to them.
- IV. His account of himself and his own affairs.
- V. His declaration of his purpose to come and see them.
- VI. His desire of a share in their prayers.

ROMANS 15:1-4

TENDERNESS AND GENEROSITY

The apostle here lays down two precepts, with reasons to enforce them, showing the duty of the strong Christian to consider and condescend to the weakest.

I. We must *bear the infirmities of the weak*, v. 1. We all have our infirmities; but the weak are more subject to them than others — the weak in knowledge or grace, the bruised reed and the smoking flax. We must consider these; not trample upon them, but encourage them, and bear with their infirmities. If through weakness they judge and censure us, and speak evil of us, we must bear with them, pity them, and not have our affections alienated from them. Alas! it is their weakness, they cannot help it. Thus

Christ bore with his weak disciples, and apologised for them. But there is more in it; we must also bear their infirmities by sympathizing with them, concerning ourselves for them, ministering strength to them, as there is occasion. This is bearing one another's burdens.

II. We must not please ourselves, but our neighbour, v. 1, 2. We must deny our own humour, in consideration of our brethren's weakness and infirmity.

1. Christians must not please themselves. We must not make it our business to gratify all the little appetites and desires of our own heart; it is good for us to cross ourselves sometimes, and then we shall the better bear others crossing of us. We shall be spoiled (as Adonijah was) if we be always humoured. The first lesson we have to learn is to deny ourselves, ~~162~~ Matthew 16:24.

2. Christians must please their brethren. The design of Christianity is to soften and meeken the spirit, to teach us the art of obliging and true complaisance; not to be servants to the lust of any, but to the necessities and infirmities of our brethren — to comply with all that we have to do with as fare as we can with a good conscience. Christians should study to be pleasing. As we must not please ourselves in the use of our Christian liberty (which was allowed us, not for our own pleasure, but for the glory of God and the profit and edification of others), so we must please our neighbour. How amiable and comfortable a society would the church of Christ be if Christians would study to please one another, as now we see them commonly industrious to cross, and thwart, and contradict one another! — *Please his neighbour*, not in every thing, it is not an unlimited rule; but *for his good*, especially for the good of his soul: not please him by serving his wicked wills, and humouring him in a sinful way, or consenting to his enticements, or suffering sin upon him; this is a base way of pleasing our neighbour to the ruin of his soul: if we thus please men, we are not the servants of Christ; but please him for his good; not for our own secular good, or to make a prey of him, but for his spiritual good. — *To edification*, that is, not only for his profit, but for the profit of others, to edify the body of Christ, by studying to oblige one another. The closer the stones lie, and the better they are squared to fit one another, the stronger is the building. Now observe the reason why Christians must please one another: *For even Christ pleased not himself*. The self-denial of our Lord Jesus is the best argument against the selfishness of Christians. Observe,

(1.) That Christ pleased not himself. He did not consult his own worldly credit, ease, safety, nor pleasure; he had not where to lay his head, lived upon alms, would not be made a king, detested no proposal with greater abhorrence than that, *Master, spare thyself*, did not seek his own will (^{<450>}John 5:30), washed his disciples' feet, endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, troubled himself (^{<413>}John 11:33), did not consult his own honour, and, in a word, emptied himself, and made himself of no reputation: and all this for our sakes, to bring in a righteousness for us, and to set us an example. His whole life was a self-denying self-displeasing life. He bore the *infirmities of the weak*, ^{<3045>}Hebrews 4:15.

(2.) That herein the scripture was fulfilled: *As it is written, The reproaches of those that reproached thee fell on me*. This is quoted out of ^{<460>}Psalm 69:9, the former part of which verse is applied to Christ (^{<417>}John 2:17), *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*; and the latter part here; for David was a type of Christ, and his sufferings of Christ's sufferings. It is quoted to show that Christ was so far from pleasing himself that he did in the highest degree displease himself. Not as if his undertaking, considered on the whole, were a task and grievance to him, for he was very willing to it and very cheerful in it; but in his humiliation the content and satisfaction of natural inclination were altogether crossed and denied. He preferred our benefit before his own ease and pleasure. This the apostle chooses to express in scripture language; for how can the things of the Spirit of God be better spoken of than in the Spirit's own words? And this scripture he alleges, *The reproaches of those that reproached thee fell on me*.

[1.] The shame of those reproaches, which Christ underwent. Whatever dishonour was done to God was a trouble to the Lord Jesus. He was grieved for the hardness of people's hearts, beheld a sinful place with sorrow and tears. When the saints were persecuted, Christ so far displeased himself as to take what was done to them as done against himself: *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Christ also did himself endure the greatest indignities; there was much of reproach in his sufferings.

[2.] The sin of those reproaches, for which Christ undertook to satisfy; so many understand it. Every sin is a kind of reproach to God, especially presumptuous sins; now the guilt of these fell upon Christ, when he was made sin, that is, a sacrifice, a sin-offering for us. When the Lord laid upon him the iniquities of us all, and he bore our sins in his own body

upon the tree, they fell upon him as upon our surety. *Upon me be the curse.* This was the greatest piece of self-displacency that could be: considering his infinite spotless purity and holiness, the infinite love of the Father to him, and his eternal concern for his Father's glory, nothing could be more contrary to him, nor more against him, than to be made sin and a curse for us, and to have the reproaches of God fall upon him, especially considering for whom he thus displeased himself, for strangers, enemies, and traitors, the *just for the unjust*, ~~1~~ Peter 3:18. This seems to come in as a reason why we should bear the infirmities of the weak. We must not please ourselves, for Christ pleased not himself; we must bear the infirmities of the weak, for Christ bore the reproaches of those that reproached God. He bore the guilt of sin and the curse for it; we are only called to bear a little of the trouble of it. he bore the presumptuous sins of the wicked; we are called only to bear the infirmities of the weak. — *Even Christ; kai gar ho Christos.* Even he who was infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself, who needed not us nor our services, — even he who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, who had reason enough to pleas himself, and no reason to be concerned, much less to be crossed, for us, — even he pleased not himself, even he bore our sins. And should not we be humble, and self-denying, and ready to consider one another, who are members one of another?

(3.) That therefore we must go and do likewise: *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.*

[1.] That which is written of Christ, concerning his self-denial and sufferings, is *written for our learning*; he hath left us an example. If Christ denied himself, surely we should deny ourselves, from a principle of ingenuousness and of gratitude, and especially of conformity to his image. The example of Christ, in what he did and said, is recorded for our imitation.

[2.] That which is written in the scriptures of the Old Testament in the general is written for our learning. What David had said in his own person Paul had just now applied to Christ. Now lest this should look like a straining of the scripture, he gives us this excellent rule in general, that all the scriptures of the Old Testament (much more those of the New) were written for our learning, and are not to be looked upon as of private interpretation. What happened to the Old-Testament saint happened to them for ensample; and the scriptures of the Old Testament have many

fulfillings. The scriptures are left for a standing rule to us: they are *written*, that they might remain for our use and benefit. *First*, For our learning. There are many things to be learned out of the scriptures; and that is the best learning which is drawn from these fountains. Those are the most learned that are most mighty in the scriptures. We must therefore labour, not only to understand the literal meaning of the scripture, but to learn out of it that which will do us good; and we have need of help therefore not only to roll away the stone, but to draw out the water, for in many places the well is deep. Practical observations are more necessary than critical expositions. *Secondly*, *That we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*. That hope which hath eternal life for its object is here proposed as the end of scripture-learning. The scripture was written that we might know what to hope for from God, and upon what grounds, and in what way. This should recommend the scripture to us that it is a special friend to Christian hope. Now the way of attaining this hope is *through patience and comfort of the scripture*. Patience and comfort suppose trouble and sorrow; such is the lot of the saints in this world; and, were it not so, we should have no occasion for patience and comfort. But both these befriend that hope which is the life of our souls. Patience works experience, and experience hope, which maketh not ashamed, ~~☞~~ Romans 5:3-5. The more patience we exercise under troubles the more hopefully we may look through our troubles; nothing more destructive to hope than impatience. And the *comfort of the scriptures*, that comfort which springs from the word of God (that is the surest and sweetest comfort) is likewise a great stay to hope, as it is an earnest in hand of the good hoped for. The Spirit, as a comforter, is the earnest of our inheritance.

~~☞~~ ROMANS 15:5-6

CHRISTIAN UNITY

The apostle, having delivered two exhortations, before he proceeds to more, intermixes here a prayer for the success of what he had said. Faithful ministers water their preaching with their prayers, because, whoever sows the seed, it is God that gives the increase. We can but speak to the ear; it is God's prerogative to speak to the heart. Observe,

I. The title he gives to God: *The God of patience and consolation*, who is both the author and the foundation of all the patience and consolation of the saints, from whom it springs and on whom it is built. He gives the grace of patience; he confirms and keeps it up as the God of consolation; for the comforts of the Holy Ghost help to support believers, and to bear them up with courage and cheerfulness under all their afflictions. When he comes to beg the pouring out of the spirit of love and unity he addresses himself to God as the God of patience and consolation; that is,

1. As a God that bears with us and comforts us, is not extreme to mark what we do amiss, but is ready to comfort those that are cast down — to teach us so to testify our love to our brethren, and by these means to preserve and maintain unity, by being patient one with another and comfortable one to another. Or,

2. As a God that gives us patience and comfort. He had spoken (v. 4) of patience and comfort of the scriptures; but here he looks up to God as the God of patience and consolation: it comes through the scripture as the conduit-pipe, but from God as the fountain-head. The more patience and comfort we receive from God, the better disposed we are to love one another. Nothing breaks the peace more than an impatient, and peevish, and fretful melancholy temper.

II. The mercy he begs of God: *Grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus.*

1. The foundation of Christian love and peace is laid in like-mindedness, a consent in judgment as far as you have attained, or at least a concord and agreement in affection. *To auto phronein* — *to mind the same thing*, all occasions of difference removed, and all quarrels laid aside.

2. This like-mindedness must be *according to Christ Jesus*, according to the precept of Christ, the royal law of love, according to the pattern and example of Christ, which he had propounded to them for their imitation, v. 3. Or, “Let Christ Jesus be the centre of your unity. Agree in the truth, not in any error.” It was a cursed concord and harmony of those who were of one mind to give their power and strength to the beast (⁶⁶⁷³Revelation 17:13); this was not a like-mindedness according to Christ, but against Christ; like the Babel-builders, who were one in their rebellion, ⁶¹¹⁶Genesis 11:6. The method of our prayer must be first for truth, and then for peace;

for such is the method of the wisdom that is from above: *it is first pure, then peaceable*. This is to be like-minded according to Christ Jesus.

3. Like-mindedness among Christians, according to Christ Jesus, is the gift of God; and a precious gift it is, for which we must earnestly seek unto him. He is the *Father of spirits*, and fashions the hearts of men alike (~~4385~~ Psalm 33:15), opens the understanding, softens the heart, sweetens the affections, and gives the grace of love, and the Spirit as a Spirit of love, to those that ask him. We are taught to pray that the will of God may be done on earth as it is done in heaven — now there it is done unanimously, among the angels, who are one in their praises and services; and our desire must be that the saints on earth may be so too.

III. The end of his desire: that God may be glorified, v. 6. This is his plea with God in prayer, and is likewise an argument with them to seek it. We should have the glory of God in our eye in every prayer; therefore our first petition, as the foundation of all the rest, must be, *Hallowed be thy name*. Like-mindedness among Christians is in order to our glorifying God,

1. *With one mind and one mouth*. It is desirable that Christians should agree in every thing, that so they may agree in this, to praise God together. It tends very much to the glory of God, who is one, and his name one, when it is so. It will not suffice that there be one mouth, but there must be one mind, for God looks at the heart; nay, there will hardly be one mouth where there is not one mind, and God will scarcely be glorified where there is not a sweet conjunction of both. One mouth in confessing the truths of God, in praising the name of God — one mouth in common converse, not jarring, biting, and devouring one another — one mouth in the solemn assembly, one speaking, but all joining.

2. *As the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. This is his New-Testament style. God must be glorified as he has now revealed himself in the face of Jesus Christ, according to the rules of the gospel, and with an eye to Christ, in whom he is our Father. The unity of Christians glorifies *God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, because it is a kind of counter-part or representation of the oneness that is between the Father and the Son. We are warranted so to speak of it, and, with that in our eye, to desire it, and pray for it, from ~~4372~~ John 17:21, *That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee*: a high expression of the honour and sweetness of the saints' unity. And it follows, *The the world may believe that thou hast*

sent me; and so God may be glorified as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 15:7-12

CHRISTIAN UNITY

The apostle here returns to his exhortation to Christians. What he says here (v. 7) is to the same purport with the former; but the repetition shows how much the apostle's heart was upon it. "Receive one another into your affection, into your communion, and into your common conversation, as there is occasion." He had exhorted the strong to receive the weak (~~641~~Romans 14:1), here, *Receive one another*; for sometimes the prejudices of the weak Christian make him shy of the strong, as much as the pride of the strong Christian makes him shy of the weak, neither of which ought to be. Let there be a mutual embracing among Christians. Those that have received Christ by faith must receive all Christians by brotherly love; though poor in the world, though persecuted and despised, though it may be matter of reproach and danger to you to receive them, though in the less weighty matters of the law they are of different apprehensions, though there may have been occasion for private piques, yet, laying aside these and the like considerations, *receive you one another*. Now the reason why Christians must receive one another is taken, as before, from the condescending love of Christ to us: *As Christ also received us, to the glory of God*. Can there be a more cogent argument? Has Christ been so kind to us, and shall we be so unkind to those that are his? Was he so forward to entertain us, and shall we be backward to entertain our brethren? Christ has received us into the nearest and dearest relations to himself: has received us into his fold, into his family, into the adoption of sons, into a covenant of friendship, yea, into a marriage-covenant with himself; he has received us (though we were strangers and enemies, and had played the prodigal) into fellowship and communion with himself. Those words, *to the glory of God*, may refer both to Christ's receiving us, which is our pattern, and to our receiving one another, which is our practice according to that pattern.

I. Christ hath received us to the glory of God. The end of our reception by Christ is that we might glorify God in this world, and be glorified with

him in that to come. It was the glory of God, and our glory in the enjoyment of God, that Christ had in his eye when he condescended to receive us. We are called to an eternal glory by Christ Jesus, ^{<4974>}John 17:24. See to what he received us — to a happiness transcending all comprehension; see for what he received us — for his Father's glory; he had this in his eye in all the instances of his favour to us.

II. We must receive one another to the glory of God. This must be our great end in all our actions, that God may be glorified; and nothing more conduces to this than the mutual love and kindness of those that profess religion; compare v. 6, *That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God.* That which was a bone of contention among them was a different apprehension about meats and drinks, which took rise in distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Now, to prevent and make up this different, he shows how Jesus Christ has received both Jews and Gentiles; in him they are both one, *one new man*, ^{<4974>}Ephesians 2:14-16. Now it is a rule, *Quae conveniunt in aliquo tertio, inter se conveniunt* — *Things which agree with a third thing agree with each other.* Those that agree in Christ, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, and the great centre of unity, may well afford to agree among themselves. This coalescence of the Jews and Gentiles in Christ and Christianity was a thing that filled and affected Paul so much that he could not mention it without some enlargement and illustration.

1. He received the Jews, v. 8. Let not any think hardly or scornfully therefore of those that were originally Jews, and still, through weakness, retain some savour of their old Judaism; for,

(1.) Jesus Christ was a *minister of the circumcision*. That he was a *minister*, *diakonos* — *a servant*, bespeaks his great and exemplary condescension, and puts an honour upon the ministry: but that he was a minister of the circumcision, was himself circumcised and made under the law, and did in his own person preach the gospel to the Jews, who were of the circumcision — this makes the nation of the Jews more considerable than otherwise they appear to be. Christ conversed with the Jews, blessed them, looked upon himself as primarily sent to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel, laid hold of the seed of Abraham* (^{<5026>}Hebrews 2:16, *margin*), and by them, as it were, caught at the whole body of mankind. Christ's personal ministry was appropriated to them, though the apostles had their commission enlarged.

(2.) He was so for the truth of God. That which he preached to them was the truth; for he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, ~~John~~ John 18:37. And he is himself the truth, ~~John~~ John 14:6. Or, for the truth of God, that is, to make good the promises given to the patriarchs concerning the special mercy God had in store for their seed. It was not for the merit of the Jews, but for the truth of God, that they were thus distinguished — that God might approve himself true to this word which he had spoken. — *To confirm the promises made unto the fathers.* The best confirmation of promises is the performance of them. It was promised that in the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth should be blessed, that Shiloh should come from between the feet of Judah, that out of Israel should he proceed that should have the dominion, that out of Zion should go forth the law, and many the like. There were many intermediate providences which seemed to weaken those promises, providences which threatened the fatal decay of that people; but when Messiah the Prince appeared in the fulness of time, as a minister of the circumcision, all these promises were confirmed, and the truth of them was made to appear; for in Christ all the promises of God, both those of the Old Testament and those of the New, are Yea, and in him Amen. Understanding by *the promises made to the fathers* the whole covenant of grace, darkly administered under the Old Testament, and brought to a clearer light now under the gospel, it was Christ's great errand to confirm that covenant, ~~Daniel~~ Daniel 9:27. He confirmed it by shedding the blood of the covenant.

2. He received the Gentiles likewise. This he shows, v. 9-12.

(1.) Observe Christ's favour to the Gentiles, in taking them in to praise God — the work of the church on earth and the wages of that in heaven. One design of Christ was that the Gentiles likewise might be converted that they might be one with the Jews in Christ's mystical body. A good reason why they should not think the worse of any Christian for his having been formerly a Gentile; for Christ has received him. He invites the Gentiles, and welcomes them. Now observe how their conversion is here expressed: *That the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.* A periphrasis of conversion.

[1.] They shall have matter for praise, even the mercy of God. Considering the miserable and deplorable condition that the Gentile world was in, the receiving of them appears more as an act of mercy than the receiving of the Jews. Those that were *Lo-ammi* — *not a people*, were *Lo-ruhama* —

not obtaining mercy, ³⁰⁶Hosea 1:6, 9; 2:23. The greatest mercy of God to any people is the receiving of them into covenant with himself: and it is good to take notice of God's mercy in receiving us.

[2.] They shall have a heart for praise. They shall glorify God for his mercy. Unconverted sinners do nothing to glorify God; but converting grace works in the soul a disposition to speak and do all to the glory of God; God intended to reap a harvest of glory from the Gentiles, who had been so long turning his glory into shame.

(2.) The fulfilling of the scriptures in this. The favour of God to the Gentiles was not only mercy, but truth. Though there were not promises directly given to them, as to the fathers of the Jews, yet there were many prophesies concerning them, which related to the calling of them, and the embodying of them in the church, some of which he mentions because it was a thing that the Jews were hardly persuaded to believe. Thus, by referring them to the Old Testament, he labours to qualify their dislike of the Gentiles, and so to reconcile the parties at variance.

[1.] It was foretold that the Gentiles should have the gospel preached to them: "*I will confess to thee among the Gentiles* (v. 9), that is, thy name shall be known and owned in the Gentile world, there shall gospel grace and love be celebrated." This is quoted from ³⁸⁴⁹Psalm 18:49, *I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen*. A thankful explication and commemoration of the name of God are an excellent means of drawing others to know and praise God. Christ, in and by his apostles and ministers, whom he sent to disciple all nations, did confess to God among the Gentiles. The exaltation of Christ, as well as the conversion of sinners, is set forth by the praising of God. Christ's declaring God's name to his brethren is called *his praising God in the midst of the congregation*, ⁴²⁷²Psalm 22:22. Taking these words as spoken by David, they were spoken when he was old and dying, and he was not likely to confess to God among the Gentiles; but when David's psalms are read and sung among the Gentiles, to the praise and glory of God, it may be said that David is *confessing to God among the Gentiles, and singing to his name*. He that was the sweet psalmist of the Gentiles. Converting grace makes people greatly in love with David's psalms. Taking them as spoken by Christ, the Son of David, it may be understood of his spiritual indwelling by faith in the hearts of all the praising saints. If any confess to God among the Gentiles, and sing to his name, it is not they, but Christ and his

grace in them. *I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*; so, I praise, yet not I, but Christ in me.

[2.] That the Gentiles should *rejoice with his people*, v. 10. This is quoted from that song of Moses, ^{<652B>}Deuteronomy 32:43. Observe, Those who were incorporated among his people are said to rejoice with his people. No greater joy can come to any people than the coming of the gospel among them in power. Those Jews that retain a prejudice against the Gentiles will by no means admit them to any of their joyful festivities; for (say they) a stranger intermeddled not with the joy, ^{<14D>}Proverbs 14:10. But, the partition-wall being taken down, the Gentiles are welcome to rejoice with his people. Being brought into the church, they share in its sufferings, are companions in patience and tribulation, to recompense which they share in the joy.

[3.] That they should praise God (v. 11): *Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles*. This is quoted out of that short psalm, ^{<130L>}Psalm 117:1. Converting grace sets people a praising God, furnishes with the richest matter for praise, and gives a heart to it. The Gentiles had been, for many ages, praising their idols of wood and stone, but now they are brought to praise the Lord; and this David in spirit speaks of. In calling upon all the nations to praise the Lord, it is intimated that they shall have the knowledge of him.

[4.] That they should believe in Christ (v. 12), quoted from ^{<211D>}Isaiah 11:10, where observe, *First*, The revelation of Christ, as the Gentiles' king. He is here called *the root of Jesse*, that is, such a branch from the family of David as is the very life and strength of the family: compare ^{<211L>}Isaiah 11:1. Christ was David's Lord, and yet withal he was the Son of David (^{<125L>}Matthew 22:45), for he was the *root and offspring of David*, ^{<626L>}Revelation 22:16. Christ, as God, was David's root; Christ, as man, was David's offspring. — *And he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles*. This explains the figurative expression of the prophet, he shall *stand for an ensign of the people*. When Christ rose from the dead, when he ascended on high, it was to reign over the Gentiles. *Secondly*, The recourse of the Gentiles to him: *In him shall the Gentiles trust*. Faith is the soul's confidence in Christ and dependence on him. The prophet has it, *to him shall the Gentiles seek*. The method of faith is first to seek unto Christ, as to one proposed to us for a Saviour; and, finding him able and willing to save, then to trust in him. Those that know him will trust in him. Or, this seeking to him is the effect of a trust in him; seeking him by prayer, and

pursuant endeavours. We shall never seek to Christ till we trust in him. Trust is the mother; diligence in the use of means the daughter. Jews and Gentiles being thus united in Christ's love, why should they not be united in one another's love?

ROMANS 15:13

THE GOD OF HOPE

Here is another prayer directed to God, as the God of hope; and it is, as the former (v. 5, 6), for spiritual blessings: these are the blest blessings, and to be first and chiefly prayed for.

I. Observe how he addresses himself to God, as the *God of hope*. It is good in prayer to fasten upon those names, titles, and attributes of God, which are most suitable to the errand we come upon, and will best serve to encourage our faith concerning it. Every word in the prayer should be a plea. Thus should the cause be skilfully ordered, and the mouth filled with arguments. God is the God of hope. He is the foundation on which our hope is built, and he is the builder that doth himself raise it: he is both the object of our hope, and the author of it. That hope is but fancy, and will deceive us, which is not fastened upon God (as the goodness hoped for, and the truth hoped in), and which is not of his working in us. We have both together, ⁴⁴⁹Psalm 119:49. *Thy word* — there is God the object; *on which thou hast caused me to hope* — there is God the author of our hope, ⁴⁰³1 Peter 1:3.

II. What he asks of God, not for himself, but for them.

1. *That they might be filled with all joy and peace in believing.* Joy and peace are two of those things in which the kingdom of God consists, ⁴⁴⁷Romans 14:17. Joy in God, peace of conscience, both arising from a sense of our justification; see ⁴⁰¹Romans 5:1, 2. Joy and peace in our own bosoms would promote a cheerful unity and unanimity with our brethren. Observe,

(1.) How desirable this joy and peace are: they are filling. Carnal joy puffs up the soul, but cannot fill it; therefore in laughter the heart is sad. True, heavenly, spiritual joy is filling to the soul; it has a satisfaction in it,

answerable to the soul's vast and just desires. Thus does God satiate and replenish the weary soul. Nothing more than this joy, only more of it, even the perfection of it in glory, is the desire of the soul that hath it, ~~3916~~ Psalm 4:6, 7; 36:8; 63:5; 65:4.

(2.) How it is attainable.

[1.] By prayer. We must go to God for it; he will for this be enquired of. Prayer fetches in spiritual joy and peace.

[2.] By believing; that is the means to be used. It is vain, and flashy, and transient joy, that is the product of fancy; true substantial joy is the fruit of faith. *Believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable,* ~~4018~~ 1 Peter 1:8. It is owing to the weakness of our faith that we are so much wanting in joy and peace. Only believe; believe the goodness of Christ, the love of Christ, the promises of the covenant, and the joys and glories of heaven; let faith be the substance and evidence of these things, and the result must needs be joy and peace. Observe, It is *all* joy and peace — all sorts of true joy and peace. When we come to God by prayer we must enlarge our desires; we are not straitened in him, why should we be straitened in ourselves? Ask for all joy; open thy mouth wide, and he will fill it.

2. That they might *abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.* The joy and peace of believers arise chiefly from their hopes. What is laid out upon them is but little, compared with what is laid up for them; therefore the more hope they have the more joy and peace they have. We do then abound in hope when we hope for great things from God, and are greatly established and confirmed in these hopes. Christians should desire and labour after an abundance of hope, such hope as will not make ashamed. This is through the power of the Holy Ghost. The same almighty power that works grace begets and strengthens this hope. Our own power will never reach it; and therefore where this hope is, and is abounding, the blessed Spirit must have all the glory.

~~4514~~ ROMANS 15:14-16

PAUL COMMENDS THE BRETHERN

Here,

I. He commends these Christians with the highest characters that could be. He began his epistle with their praises (ch 1:8), *Your faith is spoken of throughout the world*, thereby to make way for his discourse: and, because sometimes he had reprov'd them sharply, he now concludes with the like commendation, to qualify them, and to part friends. This he does like an orator. It was not a piece of idle flattery and compliment, but a due acknowledgment of their worth, and of the grace of God in them. We must be forward to observe and commend in others that which is excellent and praise-worthy; it is part of the present recompence of virtue and usefulness, and will be of use to quicken others to a holy emulation. It was a great credit to the Romans to be commended by Paul, a man of such great judgment and integrity, too skilful to be deceived and too honest to flatter. Paul had no personal acquaintance with these Christians, and yet he says he was persuaded of their excellencies, though he knew them only by hearsay. As we must not, on the one hand, be so simple as to believe every word; so, on the other hand, we must not be so skeptical as to believe nothing; but especially we must be forward to believe good concerning others: in this case charity hopeth all things, and believeth all things, and (if the probabilities be any way strong, as here they were) is persuaded. It is safer to err on this side. Now observe what it was that he commended them for.

1. That they *were full of goodness*; therefore the more likely to take in good part what he had written, and to account it a kindness; and not only so, but to comply with it, and to put it in practice, especially that which relates to their union and to the healing of their differences. A good understanding of one another, and a good will to one another, would soon put an end to strife.

2. *Filled with all knowledge.* Goodness and knowledge together! A very rare and an excellent conjunction; the head and the heart of the new man. All knowledge, all necessary knowledge, all the knowledge of those things which belong to their everlasting peace.

3. *Able to admonish one another.* To this there is a further gift requisite, even the gift of utterance. Those that have goodness and knowledge should communicate what they have for the use and benefit of others. "You that excel so much in good gifts may think you have no need of any instructions of mine." It is a comfort to faithful ministers to see their work superseded by the gifts and graces of their people. How gladly would

ministers leave off their admonishing work, if people were able and willing to admonish one another! Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets. But that which is every body's work is nobody's work; and therefore,

II. He clears himself from the suspicion of intermeddling needlessly with that which did not belong to him, v. 15. Observe how affectionately he speaks to them: *My brethren* (v. 14), and again, *brethren*, v. 15. He had himself, and taught others, the art of obliging. He calls them all his brethren, to teach them brotherly love one to another. Probably he wrote the more courteously to them because, being Roman citizens living near the court, they were more genteel, and made a better figure; and therefore Paul, who became all things to all men, was willing, by the respectfulness of his style, to please them for their good. He acknowledges he had written *boldly in some sort* — *tolmeroteron apo merous*, in a manner that looked like boldness and presumption, and for which some might perhaps charge him with taking too much upon him. But then consider,

1. He did it only as their remembrancer: *As putting you in mind*. such humble thoughts had Paul of himself, though he excelled in knowledge, that he would not pretend to tell them that which they did not know before, but only to remind them of that in which they had formerly been by others instructed. So Peter, ^{<A12>}2 Peter 1:12; 3:1. People commonly excuse themselves from hearing the word with this, that the minister can tell them nothing but what they knew before. If it be so, yet have they not need to know it better, and to be put in mind of it?

2. He did it as the apostle of the Gentiles. It was in pursuance of his office: *Because of the grace* (that is, the *apostleship*, ^{<A15>}Romans 1:5) *given to me of God*, to be the minister of *Jesus Christ to the Gentiles*, v. 16. Paul reckoned it a great favour, and an honour that God had put upon him, in putting him into that office, ^{<A13>}Romans 1:13. Now, because of this grace given to him, he thus laid out himself among the Gentiles, that he might not receive that grace of God in vain. Christ received that he might give; so did Paul; so have we talents which must not be buried. Places and offices must be filled up with duty. It is good for ministers to be often remembering the grace that is given unto them of God. *Minister verbi es, hoc age* — *You are a minister of the word; give yourself wholly to it*, was Mr. Perkins's motto. Paul was a minister. Observe here,

(1.) Whose minister he was: the *minister of Jesus Christ*, ^{<401>}1 Corinthians 4:1. He is our Master; his we are, and him we serve.

(2.) To whom: to the Gentiles. So God had appointed him, ^{<402>}Acts 22:21. So Peter and he had agreed, ^{<403>}Galatians 2:7-9. These Romans were Gentiles: “Now,” says he, “I do not thrust myself upon you, nor seek any lordship over you; I am appointed to it: if you think I am rude and bold, my commission is my warrant, and must bear me out.”

(3.) What he ministered: the *gospel of God*; *hierourgounta to euangelion* — *ministering as about holy things* (so the word signifies), executing the office of a Christian priest, more spiritual, and therefore more excellent, than the Levitical priesthood.

(4.) For what end: *that the offering up* (or sacrificing) *of the Gentiles might be acceptable* — that god might have the glory which would redound to his name by the conversion of the Gentiles. Paul laid out himself thus to bring about something that might be acceptable to God. Observe how the conversion of the Gentiles is expressed: it is the *offering up of the Gentiles*; it is *prosphora ton ethnon* — *the oblation of the Gentiles*, in which the Gentiles are looked upon either,

[1.] As the priests, offering the oblation of prayer and praise and other acts of religion. Long had the Jews been the holy nation, the kingdom of priests, but now the Gentiles are made priests unto God (^{<404>}Revelation 5:10), by their conversion to the Christian faith consecrated to the service of God, that the scripture may be fulfilled, *In ever place incense shall be offered, and a pure offering*, ^{<405>}Malachi 1:11. The converted Gentiles are said to be *made nigh* (^{<406>}Ephesians 2:13) — the periphrasis of priests. Or,

[2.] The Gentiles are themselves the sacrifice offered up to God by Paul, in the name of Christ, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, ^{<407>}Romans 12:1. A sanctified soul is offered up to God in the flames of love, upon Christ the altar. Paul gathered in souls by his preaching, not to keep them to himself, but to offer them up to God: *Behold, I, and the children that God hath given me*. And it is an acceptable offering, *being sanctified by the Holy Ghost*. Paul preached to them, and dealt with them; but that which made them sacrifices to God was their sanctification; and this was not his work, but the work of the Holy Ghost. None are acceptably offered to God but those that are sanctified: unholy things can never be pleasing to the holy God.

ROMANS 15:17-21

THE APOSTLE'S LABOURS

The apostle here gives some account of himself and of his own affairs. Having mentioned his ministry and apostleship, he goes on further to magnify his office in the efficacy of it, and to mention to the glory of God the great success of his ministry and the wonderful things that God had done by him, for encouragement to the Christian church at Rome, that they were not alone in the profession of Christianity, but though, compared with the multitude of their idolatrous neighbours, they were but a little flock, yet, up and down the country, there were many that were their companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. It was likewise a great confirmation of the truth of the Christian doctrine that it had such strange success, and was so far propagated by such weak and unlikely means, such multitudes captivated to the obedience of Christ by the foolishness of preaching. Therefore Paul gives them this account, which he makes the matter of his glorying; not vain glory, but holy gracious glorying, which appears by the limitations; it is *through Jesus Christ*. Thus does he centre all his glorying in Christ; he teaches us so to do, ^{<415>}1 Corinthians 1:31. *Not unto us*, ^{<416>}Psalm 115:1. And it is *in those things which pertain to God*. The conversion of souls is one of those things that pertain to God, and therefore is the matter of Paul's glorying; not the things of the flesh. *Whereof I may glory*, *echo oun kauchessin en Christo Iesou ta pros Theon*. I would rather read it thus: *Therefore I have a rejoicing in Christ Jesus* (it is the same word that is used, ^{<417>}2 Corinthians 1:12, and ^{<418>}Philippians 3:3, where it is the character of the circumcision that they rejoice — *kauchomenoi*, in Christ Jesus) *concerning the things of God; or those things that are offered to God — the living sacrifices of the Gentiles*, v. 16. Paul would have them to rejoice with him in the extent and efficacy of his ministry, of which he speaks not only with the greatest deference possible to the power of Christ, and the effectual working of the Spirit as all in all; but with a protestation of the truth of what he said (v. 18): *I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me*. He would not boast of things without his line, nor take the praise of another man's work, as he might have done when he was writing to distant strangers, who perhaps could not contradict him; but (says he) I dare not do it: a faithful man dares not lie, however he be tempted, dares

be true, however he be terrified. now, in this account of himself, we may observe,

I. His unwearied diligence and industry in his work. He was one that laboured *more abundantly than they all*.

1. He preached in many places: *From Jerusalem*, whence the law went forth as a lamp that shineth, and *round about unto Illyricum*, many hundred miles distant from Jerusalem. We have in the book of the Acts an account of Paul's travels. There we find him, after he was sent forth to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 13), labouring in that blessed work in Seleucia, Cyprus, Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia (Acts 13 and 14), afterwards travelling through Syria and Cilicia, Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Troas, and thence called over to Macedonia, and so into Europe, Acts 15 and 16. Then we find him very busy at Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and the parts adjacent. Those that know the extent and distance of these countries will conclude Paul an active man, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. Illyricum is the country now called Slavonia, bordering upon Hungary. Some take it for the same with Bulgaria; others for the lower Pannonia: however, it was a great way from Jerusalem. Now it might be suspected that if Paul undertook so much work, surely he did it by the halves. "No," says he, "*I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ* — have given them a full account of the truth and terms of the gospel, have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God (⁴⁰⁷Acts 20:27), have kept back nothing that was necessary for them to know." *Filled the gospel*, so the word is; *peplerokenai to euangelion*, filled it as the net is filled with fishes in a large draught; or filled the gospel, that is, filled them with the gospel. Such a change does the gospel make that, when it comes in power to any place, it fills the place. Other knowledge is airy, and leaves souls empty, but he knowledge of the gospel is filling.

2. He preached in places that had not heard the gospel before, v. 20, 21. He broke up the fallow ground, laid the first stone in many places, and introduced Christianity where nothing had reigned for many ages but idolatry and witchcraft, and all sorts of diabolism. Paul broke the ice, and therefore must needs meet with the more difficulties and discouragements in his work. Those who preached in Judea had upon this account a much easier task than Paul, who was the apostle of the Gentiles; for they entered into the labours of others, ⁴⁰⁸John 4:38. Paul, being a hardy man, was called out to the hardest work; there were many instructors, but Paul was

the great father — many that watered, but Paul was the great planter. Well, he was a bold man that made the first attack upon the palace of the strong man armed in the Gentile world, that first assaulted Satan's interest there, and Paul was that man who ventured the first onset in many places, and suffered greatly for it. He mentions this as a proof of his apostleship; for the office of the apostles was especially to bring in those that were without, and to lay the foundations of the new Jerusalem; see ^{<614}Revelation 21:14. Not but that Paul preached in many places where others had been at work before him; but he principally and mainly laid himself out for the good of those that sat in darkness. He was in care not to *build upon another man's foundation*, lest he should thereby disprove his apostleship, and give occasion to those who sought occasion to reflect upon him. He quotes a scripture for this out of ^{<2525}Isaiah 52:15, *To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see. That which had not been told them, shall they see*; so the prophet has it, much to the same purport. This made the success of Paul's preaching the more remarkable. The transition from darkness to light is more sensible than the after-growth and increase of that light. And commonly the greatest success of the gospel is at its first coming to a place; afterwards people become sermon-proof.

II. The great and wonderful success that he had in his work: It was effectual to *make the Gentiles obedient*. The design of the gospel is to bring people to be *obedient*; it is not only a truth to be believed, but a law to be obeyed. This Paul aimed at in all his travels; not his own wealth and honour (if he had, he had sadly missed his aim), but the conversion and salvation of souls: this his heart was upon, and for this he travailed in birth again. Now how was this great work wrought? 1. Christ was the principal agent. He does not say, “which I worked,” but “which Christ wrought by me,” v. 18. Whatever good we do, it is not we, but Christ by us, that does it; the work is his, the strength his; he is all in all, he works all our works, ^{<1083}Philippians 2:13; ^{<2382}Isaiah 26:12. Paul takes all occasions to own this, that the whole praise might be transmitted to Christ.

2. Paul was a very active instrument: *By word and deed*, that is, by his preaching, and by the miracles he wrought to confirm his doctrine; or his preaching and his living. Those ministers are likely to win souls that preach both by word and deed, by their conversation showing forth the power of the truths they preach. This is according to Christ's example, who began both to do and teach, ^{<400}Acts 1:1. — *Through mighty signs and wonders: en dynamei semeion* — *by the power*, or in the strength, of signs

and wonders. These made the preaching of the word so effectual, being the appointed means of conviction, and the divine seal affixed to the gospel-charter, ^{<4167>}Mark 16:17, 18.

3. The *power of the Spirit of God* made this effectual, and crowned all with the desired success, v. 19.

(1.) The power of the Spirit in Paul, as in the other apostles, for the working of those miracles. Miracles were wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost (^{<4168>}Acts 1:8), therefore reproaching the miracles is called the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Or,

(2.) The power of the Spirit in the hearts of those to whom the word was preached, and who saw the miracles, making these means effectual to some and not to others. It is the Spirit's operation that makes the difference. Paul himself, as great a preacher as he was, with all his might signs and wonders, could not make one soul obedient further than the power of the Spirit of God accompanied his labours. It was the Spirit of the Lord of hosts that made those great mountains plain before this Zerubbabel. This is an encouragement to faithful ministers, who labour under the sense of great weakness and infirmity, that it is all one to the blessed Spirit to work by many, or by those that have on power. The same almighty Spirit that wrought with Paul often perfects strength in weakness, and ordains praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. This success which he had in preaching is that which he here rejoices in; for the converted nations were his joy and crown of rejoicing: and he tells them of it, not only that they might rejoice with him, but that they might be the more ready to receive the truths which he had written to them, and to own him whom Christ had thus signally owned.

^{<4152>}ROMANS 15:22-29

THE APOSTLE'S LABOURS

St. Paul here declares his purpose to come and see the Christians at Rome. Upon this head his matter is but common and ordinary, appointing a visit to his friends; but the manner of his expression is gracious and savoury, very instructive, and for our imitation. We should learn by it to speak of our common affairs in the language of Canaan. Even our common

discourse should have an air of grace; by this it will appear what country we belong to. it should seem that Paul's company was very much desired at Rome. He was a man that had as many friends and as many enemies as most men ever had: he passed through evil report and good report. No doubt they had heard much of him at Rome, and longed to see him. Should the apostle of the Gentiles be a stranger at Rome, the metropolis of the Gentile world? Why as to this he excuses it that he had not come yet, he promises to come shortly, and gives a good reason why he could not come now.

I. He excuses it that he never came yet. Observe how careful Paul was to keep in with his friends, and to prevent or anticipate any exceptions against him; not as one that lorded it over God's heritage.

1. He assures them that he had a great desire to see them; not to see Rome, though it was now in its greatest pomp and splendour, nor to see the emperor's court, nor to converse with the philosophers and learned men that were then at Rome, though such conversation must needs be very desirable to so great a scholar as Paul was, but *to come unto you* (v. 3), a company of poor despised saints in Rome, hated of the world, but loving God, and beloved of him. These were the men that Paul was ambitious of an acquaintance with at Rome; they were the excellent ones in whom he delighted, ^{<390B>}Psalm 16:3. And he had a special desire to see them, because of the great character they had in all the churches for faith and holiness; they were men that excelled in virtue, and therefore Paul was so desirous to come to them. This desire Paul had had for many years, and yet could never compass it. The providence of God wisely overrules the purposes and desires of men. God's dearest servants are not always gratified in every thing that they have a mind to. Yet all that delight in God have the desire of their heart fulfilled (^{<390A>}Psalm 37:4), though all the desires in their heart be not humoured.

2. He tells them that the reason why he could not come to them was because he had so much work cut out for him elsewhere. *For which cause*, that is, because of his labours in other countries, he was so much *hindered*. God had opened a wide door for him in other places, and so turned him aside. Observe in this,

(1.) The gracious providence of God conversant in a special manner about his ministers, casting their lot, not according to their contrivance, but

according to his own purpose. Paul was several times crossed in his intentions; sometimes hindered by Satan (as ^{<S128>}1 Thessalonians 2:18), sometimes forbidden by the Spirit (^{<416>}Acts 16:7), and here diverted by other work. Man purposes but God disposes, ^{<110>}Proverbs 16:9; 19:21; ^{<213>}Jeremiah 10:23. Ministers purpose, and their friends purpose concerning them, but God overrules both, and orders the journeys, removals, and settlements, of his faithful ministers as he pleases. The stars are in the right hand of Christ, to shine where he sets them. The gospel does not come by chance to any place, but by the will and counsel of God.

(2.) The gracious prudence of Paul, in bestowing his time and pains where there was most need. Had Paul consulted his own ease, wealth, and honour, the greatness of the word would never have hindered him from seeing Rome, but would rather have driven him thither, where he might have had more preferment and taken less pains. But Paul sought the things of Christ more than his own things, and therefore would not leave his work of planting churches, no, not for a time, to go and see Rome. The Romans were whole, and needed not the physician as other poor places that were sick and dying. While men and women were every day dropping into eternity, and their precious souls perishing for lack of vision, it was no time for Paul to trifle. There was now a gale of opportunity, the fields were white unto the harvest; such a season slipped might never be retrieved; the necessities of poor souls were pressing, and called aloud, and therefore Paul must be busy. It concerns us all to do that first which is most needful. True grace teaches us to prefer that which is necessary before that which is unnecessary, ^{<108>}Luke 10:41, 42. And Christian prudence teaches us to prefer that which is more necessary before that which is less so. This Paul mentions as a sufficient satisfying reason. We must not take it ill of our friends if they prefer necessary work, which is pleasing to God, before unnecessary visits and compliments, which may be pleasing to us. In this, as in other things, we must deny ourselves.

II. He promised to come and see them shortly, v. 23, 24, 29. *Having no more place in these parts*, namely, in Greece, where he then was. The whole of that country being more or less leavened with the savour of the gospel, churches being planted in the most considerable towns and pastors settled to carry on the work which Paul had begun, he had little more to do there. He had driven the chariot of the gospel to the sea-coast, and having thus conquered Greece he is ready to wish there were another Greece to conquer. Paul was one that went through with his work, and yet then did

not think of taking his ease, but set himself to contrive more work, to devise liberal things. Here was a workman that needed not to be ashamed. Observe,

1. How he forecasted his intended visit. His project was to see them in his way to Spain. It appears by this that Paul intended a journey into Spain, to plant Christianity there. The difficulty and peril of the work, the distance of the place, the danger of the voyage, the other good works (though less needful, he thinks) which Paul might find to do in other places, did not quench the flame of his holy zeal for the propagating of the gospel, which did even eat him up, and make him forget himself. But it is not certain whether ever he fulfilled his purpose, and went to Spain. Many of the best expositors think he did not, but was hindered in this as he was in others of his purposes. He did indeed come to Rome, but he was brought thither a prisoner, and there was detained two years; and whither he went after is uncertain: but several of his epistles which he wrote in prison intimate his purpose to go eastward, and not towards Spain. However, Paul, forasmuch as it was in thine heart to bring the light of the gospel into Spain, thou didst well, in that it was in thine heart; as God said to David, ^{<406>}2 Chronicles 6:8. The grace of God often with favour accepts the sincere intention, when the providence of God in wisdom prohibits the execution. And do not we serve a good Master then? ^{<408>}2 Corinthians 8:12. Now, in his way to Spain he proposed to come to them. Observe his prudence. It is wisdom for every one of us to order our affairs so that we may do the most work in the least time. Observe how doubtfully he speaks: *I trust to see you*: not, “I am resolved I will,” but, “I hope I shall.” We must purpose all our purposes and make all our promises in like manner with a submission to the divine providence; not boasting ourselves of to-morrow, because we know not what a day may bring forth, ^{<410>}Proverbs 27:1; ^{<5013>}James 4:13-15.

2. What he expected in his intended visit.

(1.) What he expected from them. He expected they would bring him on his way towards Spain. It was not a stately attendance, such as princes have but a loving attendance, such as friends give, that Paul expected. Spain was then a province of the empire, well known to the Romans, who had a great correspondence with it, and therefore they might be helpful to Paul in his voyage thither; and it was not barely their accompanying him part of the way, but their furthering him in his expedition, that he counted upon: not only out of their respect to Paul, but out of respect to the souls

of those poor Spaniards that Paul was going to preach to. It is justly expected from all Christians that they should lay out themselves for the promoting and furthering of every good work, especially that blessed work of the conversion of souls, which they should contrive to make as easy as may be to their ministers, and as successful as may be to poor souls.

(2.) What he expected in them: to *be somewhat filled with their company*. That which Paul desired was their company and conversation. The good company of the saints is very desirable and delightful. Paul was himself a man of great attainments in knowledge and grace, taller by head and shoulders than other Christians in these things, and yet see how he pleased himself with the thoughts of good company; for as iron sharpens iron so does a man the countenance of his friend. He intimates that he intended to make some stay with them, for he would be filled with their company; not just look at them, and away: and yet he thinks their converse so pleasant that he should never have enough of it; it is but somewhat filled, he thought he should leave them with a desire of more of their company. Christian society, rightly managed and improved, is a heaven upon earth, a comfortable earnest of our gathering together unto Christ at the great day. Yet observe, It is but somewhat filled, *apo merous* — *in part*. The satisfaction we have in communion with the saints in this world is but partial; we are but somewhat filled. It is partial compared with our communion with Christ; that, and that only, will completely satisfy, that will fill the soul. It is partial compared with the communion we hope to have with the saints in the other world. When we shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with all the saints, and none but saints, and saints made perfect, we shall have enough of that society, and be quite filled with that company.

(3.) What he expected from God with them, v. 29. He expected to come *in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ*. Observe, Concerning what he *expected from them* he speaks doubtfully: *I trust to be brought on my way, and to be filled with your company*. Paul had learnt not to be too confident of the best. These very men slipped from him afterwards, when he had occasion to use them (2 Timothy 4:16), *At my first answer, no man stood by me*; none of the Christians at Rome. The Lord teach us to cease from man. But concerning what he expected from God he speaks confidently. It was uncertain whether he should come or no, but *I am sure when I do come I shall come in the fulness*, etc. We cannot expect too little from man, nor too much from God. Now Paul expected that God would

bring him to them, loaded with blessings, so that he should be an instrument of doing a great deal of good among them, and fill them with the blessings of the gospel. Compare ~~411B~~ Romans 1:11, *That I may impart unto you some spiritual gift*. The blessing of the gospel of Christ is the best and most desirable blessing. When Paul would raise their expectation of something great and good in his coming, he directs them to hope for the blessings of the gospel, spiritual blessings, knowledge, and grace, and comfort. There is then a happy meeting between people and ministers, when they are both under the fulness of the blessing. The blessing of the gospel is the treasure which we have in earthen vessels. When ministers are fully prepared to give out, and people fully prepared to receive, this blessing, both are happy. Many have the gospel who have not the blessing of the gospel, and so they have it in vain. The gospel will not profit, unless God bless it to us; and it is our duty to wait upon him for that blessing, and for the fulness of it.

III. He gives them a good reason why he could not come and see them now, because he had other business upon his hands, which required his attendance, upon which he must first make a journey to Jerusalem, v. 25-28. He gives a particular account of it, to show that the excuse was real. He was going to Jerusalem, as the messenger of the church's charity to the poor saints there. Observe what he says,

1. Concerning this charity itself. And he speaks of that upon this occasion probably to excite the Roman Christians to do the like, according to their ability. Examples are moving, and Paul was very ingenious at begging, not for himself, but for others. Observe,

(1.) For whom it was intended: *For the poor saints which are at Jerusalem*, v. 26. It is no strange thing for saints to be poor. Those whom God favours the world often frowns upon; therefore riches are not the best things, nor is poverty a curse. It seems, the saints at Jerusalem were poorer than other saints, either because the wealth of that people in general was now declining, as their utter ruin was hastening on (and, to be sure, if any must be kept poor, the saints must), or because the famine that was over all the world in the days of Claudius Caesar did in a special manner prevail in Judea, a dry country; and, God having called the poor of this world, the Christians smarted most by it. This was the occasion of that contribution mentioned ~~411B~~ Acts 11:28-30. Or, because the saints at Jerusalem suffered most by persecution; for of all people the unbelieving

Jews were most inveterate in their rage and malice against the Christians, wrath having come upon them to the uttermost, ^{<3126>}1 Thessalonians 2:16. The Christian Hebrews are particularly noted too as having had their good spoiled (^{<3034>} Hebrews 10:34), in consideration of which this contribution was made for them. Though the saints at Jerusalem were at a great distance from them, yet they thus extended their bounty and liberality to them, to teach us as we have ability, and as there is occasion, to stretch out the hand of our charity to all that are of the household of faith, though in places distant from us. Though in personal instances of poverty every church should take care to maintain their own poor (for such poor we have always with us), yet sometimes, when more public instances of poverty are presented as objects of our charity, though a great way off from us, we must extend our bounty, as the sun his beams; and, with the virtuous woman, *stretch out our hands to the poor, and reach forth our hands to the needy*, ^{<3120>}Proverbs 31:20.

(2.) By whom it was collected: *By those of Macedonia* (the chief of whom were the Philippians) *and Achaia* (the chief of whom were the Corinthians), two flourishing churches, though yet in their infancy, newly converted to Christianity. And I wish the observation did not hold that people are commonly more liberal at their first acquaintance with the gospel than they are afterwards, that, as well as other instances of the first love and the love of the espousals, being apt to cool and decay after a while. It seems those of Macedonia and Achaia were rich and wealthy, while those at Jerusalem were poor and needy, Infinite Wisdom ordering it so that some should have what others want, and so this mutual dependence of Christians one upon another might be maintained. — *It pleased them.* This intimates how ready they were to it — they were not pressed nor constrained to it, but they did it of their own accord; and how cheerful they were in it — they took a pleasure in doing good; and God loves a cheerful giver. — *To make a certain contribution; koinonian tina* — *a communication*, in token of the communion of saints, and their fellowship, as in the natural body one member communicates to the relief, and succour, and preservation of another, as there is occasion. Every thing that passes between Christians should be a proof and instance of that common union which they have one with another in Jesus Christ. Time was when the saints at Jerusalem were on the giving hand, and very liberal they were, when they laid their estates at the apostles' feet for charitable uses, and took special care that the Grecian widows should not be

neglected in the daily ministration, ~~401~~ Acts 6:1, etc. And now that the providence of God had turned the scale, and made them necessitous, they found the Grecians kind to them; for the merciful shall obtain mercy. We should give a portion to seven, and also to eight, because we know not what evil may be on the earth, which may make us glad to be beholden to others.

(3.) What reason there was for it (v. 27): *And their debtors they are.* Alms are called righteousness, ~~402~~ Psalm 112:9. Being but stewards of what we have, we owe it where our great Master (by the calls of providence, concurring with the precepts of the word) orders us to dispose of it: but here there was a special debt owing; the Gentiles were greatly beholden to the Jews, and were bound in gratitude to be very kind to them. From the stock of Israel came Christ himself, according to the flesh, who is the light to enlighten the Gentiles; out of the same stock came the prophets, and apostles, and first preachers of the gospel. The Jews, having had the lively oracles committed to them, were the Christians' library-keepers — *out of Zion went forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*; their political church-state was dissolved, and they were cut off, that the Gentiles might be admitted in. Thus did the Gentiles partake of their spiritual things, and receive the gospel of salvation as it were at second-hand from the Jews; and therefore *their duty is*, they are bound in gratitude to *minister unto them in carnal things*: it is the least they can do: *leitourgesai* — *to minister as unto God in holy things*; so the word signifies. A conscientious regard to God in works of charity and almsgiving makes them an acceptable service and sacrifice to God, and fruit abounding to a good account. Paul mentions this, probably, as the argument he had used with them to persuade them to it, and it is an argument of equal cogency to other Gentile churches.

2. Concerning Paul's agency in this business. He could himself contribute nothing; silver and gold he had none, but lived upon the kindness of his friends; yet he *ministered unto the saints* (v. 25) by stirring up others, receiving what was gathered, and transmitting it to Jerusalem. Many good works of that kind stand at a stay for want of some one active person to lead in them, and to set the wheels a going. Paul's labour in this work is not to be interpreted as any neglect of his preaching-work, nor did Paul leave the word of God, to serve tables; for, besides this, Paul had other business in this journey, to visit and confirm the churches, and took this by the bye; this was indeed a part of the trust committed to him, in which he

was concerned to approve himself faithful (~~401~~Galatians 2:10): *They would that we should remember the poor.* Paul was one that laid out himself to do good every way, like his Master, to the bodies as well as to the souls of people. Ministering to the saints is good work, and is not below the greatest apostles. This Paul had undertaken, and therefore he resolves to go through with it, before he fell upon other work (v. 28): *When I have sealed to them this fruit.* He calls the alms *fruit*, for it is one of the fruits of righteousness; it sprang from a root of grace in the givers, and redounded to the benefit and comfort of the receivers. And his sealing it intimates his great care about it, that what was given might be kept entire, and not embezzled, but disposed of according to the design of the givers. Paul was very solicitous to approve himself faithful in the management of this matter: an excellent pattern for ministers to write after, that the ministry may in nothing be blamed.

~~450~~ ROMANS 15:30-33

PAUL DESIRES THE CHURCH'S PRAYERS

Here we have,

I. St. Paul's desire of a share in the prayers of the Romans for him, expressed very earnestly, v. 30-32. Though Paul was a great apostle, yet he begged the prayers of the meanest Christians, not here only, but in several other of the epistles. He had prayed much for them, and this he desires as the return of his kindness. Interchanging prayers is an excellent token of the interchanging of loves. Paul speaks like one that knew himself, and would hereby teach us how to value the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous. How careful should we be lest we do any thing to forfeit our interest in the love and prayers of god's praying people!

1. Observe why they must pray for him. He begs it with the greatest importunity. He might suspect they would forget him in their prayers, because they had no personal acquaintance with him, and therefore he urges it so closely, and begs it with the most affectionate obtestations, by all that is sacred and valuable: *I beseech you,*

(1.) *“For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake.* He is my Master, I am going about his work, and his glory is interested in the success of it: if you have any

regard to Jesus Christ, and to his cause and kingdom, pray for me. You love Christ, and own Christ; for his sake then do me this kindness.”

(2.) “*For the love of the Spirit.* As a proof and instance of that love which the Spirit works in the hearts of believers one to another, pray for me; as a fruit of that communion which we have one with another by the Spirit though we never saw one another. If ever you experienced the Spirit's love to you, and would be found returning your love to the Spirit, be not wanting in this office of kindness.”

2. How they must pray for him: *That you strive together.*

(1.) *That you strive in prayer.* We must put forth all that is within us in that duty; pray with fixedness, faith, and fervency; wrestle with God, as Jacob did; pray in praying, as Elias did (⁵¹⁷James 5:17), and stir up ourselves to take hold on God (²⁶⁰Isaiah 64:7); and this is not only when we are praying for ourselves, but when we are praying for our friends. True love to our brethren should make us as earnest for them as sense of our own need makes us for ourselves.

(2.) *That you strive together with me.* When he begged their prayers for him, he did not intend thereby to excuse his praying for himself; no, “*Strive together with me, who am wrestling with God daily, upon my own and my friends' account.*” He would have them to ply the same oar. Paul and these Romans were distant in place, and likely to be so, and yet they might join together in prayer; those who are put far asunder by the disposal of God's providence may yet meet together at the throne of his grace. Those who beg the prayers of others must not neglect to pray for themselves.

3. What they must beg of God for him. He mentions particulars; for, in praying both for ourselves and for our friends, it is good to be particular. *What wilt thou that I shall do for thee?* So says Christ, when he holds out the golden sceptre. Though he knows our state and wants perfectly, he will know them from us. He recommends himself to their prayers, with reference to three things: —

(1.) The dangers which he was exposed to: *That I may be delivered from those that do not believe in Judea.* The unbelieving Jews were the most violent enemies Paul had and most enraged against him, and some prospect he had of trouble from them in this journey; and therefore they

must pray that God would deliver him. We may, and must, pray against persecution. This prayer was answered in several remarkable deliverances of Paul, recorded Acts 21, 22, 23, and 24.

(2.) His services: *Pray that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints.* Why, was there any danger that it would not be accepted? Can money be otherwise than acceptable to the poor? Yes, there was some ground of suspicion in this case; for Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles, and as the unbelieving Jews looked spitefully at him, which was their wickedness, so those that believed were shy of him upon that account, which was their weakness. He does not say, “Let them choose whether they will accept it or no; if they will not, it shall be better bestowed;” but, “Pray that it may be accepted.” As God must be sought unto for the restraining of the ill will of our enemies, so also for the preserving and increasing of the good will of our friends; for God has the hearts both of the one and of the other in his hands.

(3.) His journey to them. To engage their prayers for him, he interests them in his concerns (v. 32): *That I may come unto you with joy.* If his present journey to Jerusalem proved unsuccessful, his intended journey to Rome would be uncomfortable. If he should not do good, and prosper, in one visit, he thought he should have small joy of the next: *may come with joy, by the will of God.* All our joy depends upon the will of God. The comfort of the creature is in every thing according to the disposal of the Creator.

II. Here is another prayer of the apostle for them (v. 33): *Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen.* The Lord of hosts, the God of battle, is the God of peace, the author and lover of peace. He describes God under this title here, because of the divisions among them, to recommend peace to them; if God be the God of peace, let us be men of peace. The Old-Testament blessing was, *Peace be with you;* now, *The god of peace be with you.* Those who have the fountain cannot want any of the streams. *With you all;* both weak and strong. To dispose them to a nearer union, he puts them altogether in this prayer. Those who are united in the blessing of God should be united in affection one to another.