

**Intro:**

I want to bring your attention back to the subject which we began after the New Year – we are still in the ‘introductory’ section of Romans. Our section is full of expressions of warm Christian love. Let’s hear again the words with which our section begins:

---

**Romans 1:8** First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all...

---

We mentioned Paul’s life of Christian service, a life that itself is an act of worship.

We mentioned Paul’s constant prayers concerning the Romans. Really, we are still in the midst of that prayer. But remember this emphasis in Paul’s prayers – they were not for his own benefit, but for the needs and opportunity to serve others.

That brings us to the theme we will be looking at for this message:

*The Ministry of Christians to One Another*

Our text is Rm 1.11-12

It might be helpful to remind ourselves that Paul is writing to a group of Christians who are mostly unknown to him. He looks forward to meeting them and enjoying the blessing of the fellowship he is sure awaits him.

Of course, the cynic might say that it is easy to anticipate fellowship with saints we don’t know. It is like the oft-repeated rhyme:

Living above with saints we love That will be grace and glory; Living below with saints we know That is a different story.
---

But really, this is the ideal and it is the blessing of a community of Christians who are committed to Christ first and putting His will ahead of their own.

The problems you have with other Christians are because someone isn’t committed to Christ first. Maybe it’s you! Someone said that we are living in the “Pro-Me Christian Generation”. That is sadly too true.
--

So what we want to focus on today is this:

**Proposition:** Christians, gathered in local churches, are God’s agents for the purpose of strengthening one another’s spiritual life.

## I. Mutual ministry flows out of sincere personal desire

- A. The first point is a small point but an intense one: Paul deeply desired the opportunity for this mutual ministry

“He is really homesick to see them, not for old time’s sake...”<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Lexicons:

- a. Liddell-Scott: to yearn after
- b. Louw-Nida: to long for something, with the implication of recognizing a lack - ‘to long for, to deeply desire, deep desire.’

### 2. Usage in the NT

- a. Paul often speaks of longing to see people: Timothy, the Philippians, and the Thessalonians desire to see him
- b. Peter speaks about new Christians ‘earnestly desiring the sincere milk of the word’ (1 Pt 2.2)
- c. Paul speaks about ‘earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven’ [the resurrection body] (2 Cor 5.2)

How much do you desire your resurrection body?

- One of my professor’s said that we have a problem as Christians – we don’t love the Lord’s appearing, we love ‘our disappearing’.
- There may be many reasons we don’t love our earthly body, or our earthly situation, and greatly long for the resurrection [and some of those reasons are legitimate].

But do you long to minister to your fellow saints like that?

- B. Paul’s deep desire is very personal: ‘I long to see you’

**Proposition:** Christians, gathered in local churches, are God’s agents for the purpose of strengthening one another’s spiritual life.

Essential ingredient: an intense other’s oriented mindset

<sup>1</sup> Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*, p. 32.

## II. Mutual ministry looks for particular spiritual opportunities

### A. An 'on purpose' kind of life

1. The rest of the verse is a purpose statement
2. The purpose statement answers the question 'why'
  - a. 'Why do you desire to see us?'
  - b. Answer: 'To give you something'

I want to develop this more later, but you should have an 'on purpose' kind of life, and the purpose is going to be found in our verses this morning.

### B. Imparting spiritual gifts

1. Paul's purpose: to give you a spiritual gift

---

**Ephesians 4:28** Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

---

Generosity implied

2. Nature of spiritual gifts

- a. Some suggest that Paul wants to lay on hands and give them a supernatural gift
- b. Others suggest that the book of Romans itself is the spiritual gift (it certainly *is* a spiritual gift ... but not what Paul is talking about here)
- c. See Rm 12.5-8: the ordinary spiritual gifts operating within a local church
  - 1) Prophecy [proclaiming the word]
  - 2) Ministry [serving, lit. 'deaconing', 'waiting on tables']
  - 3) Teaching
  - 4) Exhorting – personal challenges, counseling
  - 5) Giving
  - 6) Ruling [administration, leading]

“The spiritual gift (v. 11) was probably not one specific gift but anything and everything of spiritual benefit.”<sup>2</sup>

When you think of coming together in the local church, do you think about what kind of gift you can give to one another?

Do you participate in church ‘on purpose’?

- Some people are ‘on purpose’ this way: “Feed me!” “Love me!” “Serve me!”
- In case you were wondering, that wouldn’t be the spiritual gift Paul had in mind.

### C. Intending to strengthen others

1. Paul will later expand on this in Ephesians as the purpose of the Christian church in all its ministry (Eph 4.11-14)
2. “Stablisth” = strengthen, firmly stabilize

Ancient Gk writer speaks of: “to support a vine by a stake and an aging man by a stick”<sup>3</sup>

Lloyd-Jones: “Conversion is not the end; it is the beginning.”<sup>4</sup>

3. The word presupposes that Christians are liable to instability
  - a. And they are
  - b. But this is the genius of the local church
  - c. Jesus said: “upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”
    - 1) He said he would build the church
    - 2) But he does it through men
4. Paul intended to go to Rome (at least in part) to help the Christians there become more firmly established in their Christian life

<sup>2</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003). Ro 1:11.

<sup>3</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976). 7:653.

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 1: The Gospel of God*, p. 20.

Why do you come to church?

Why do you stay away from church — when it suits you, or when it isn't convenient, or ...?

Are you established? Do you care to establish others?

### III. Mutual ministry increases the spiritual life of all

A. Paul expands on his purpose in v. 12

1. Complicated phrase, literally: 'and this is to be mutually encouraged in you through the in one another faith both of you and of me'
2. The phrase explains what the establishing in v. 11 is, it is a mutual encouraging

B. To be mutually encouraged ... how?

1. 'Through the in one another faith both of you and of me'
  - a. It is faith of the same kind
  - b. But it is faith of differing strengths and gifts
  - c. And in the local church it multiplies itself and increases itself from one member to another

You might see someone else enduring a great trial; their faith in trial is an encouragement to you and a strengthening for your own trials to come.

You might see someone who is a bold witness; you take courage in your own witness.

2. You may have noticed I have been using the term 'local church' a good deal in this message
  - a. Paul is writing to a local church
  - b. He intends to minister in that local church
  - c. He spent his life establishing and serving in local churches
  - d. And note this: you will not find any other Christian institution in the New Testament
    - 1) You will not find Christian colleges
    - 2) You will not find mission boards
    - 3) You will not find Christian social agencies

4) You will not find Christian hospitals

5) You will only find local churches (who do all kinds of ministry)

Note: I am not saying that these other things don't have a place – some of my friends do, I don't.

But... the primary place you need to be committed to in your life is to the ministry of a local church.

- The Lord intends to use you to build others in your local church.
- The Lord intends to build you through your local church.
- The Lord intends for your ministry to be poured out within the confines of a local church.

## Conclusion:

---

**Proposition:** Christians, gathered in local churches, are God's agents for the purpose of strengthening one another's spiritual life.

---

The Lord will never lead you outside of his Word. That means the Lord will never lead you to serve outside the auspices of a local church – no matter what other organizations you are connected with.

So... if that is true, why do we do so little within our local church?

- We know the people too well and we don't like some of them.
- We don't like the kind of service a local church needs: *i.e.*, we don't like to witness, we may not like to teach, it isn't convenient to be a help with the buildings or other physical needs, and on and on...

Remember Paul's intense desire!

---

**Romans 1:11** For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;<sup>12</sup> That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

---