

Paul's gratitude

1. *The Christian is to be a prayerful person*

• *Prayer of thanksgiving*

2. *Humility*

3. *Serving God in his spirit*

4. *He hopes to come to Rome*

5. *God's guidance*

Guidance considered

(i) *Can be a difficult matter*

Paul has introduced himself^{□1}. Now he tells of his gratitude for them^{□2} and of how he wants to visit them^{□3} and is eager to do so^{□4}.

1. **The Christian is to be a prayerful person.** ⁸*First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.* You cannot read Paul's letters without noticing how much he prays. And a main part of his praying is his thanksgiving. Paul puts it 'First of all'. His thanksgiving arises out of his assurance of salvation. 'I thank my God'. The Christian should be able to say 'my God'. Paul prays through Jesus Christ. God wants us to be thankful, but he only accepts our thanksgiving through Jesus. This is how Paul has an assurance of his salvation. He looks to Jesus.

2. **Paul has a humble attitude towards other Christians.** 'I thank my God . . . for . . . you'. This is the opposite of jealousy. Paul normally starts his letter with something that is very encouraging. The reason why we thank God for what we see in Christians is that God is the source of all spirituality. There is nothing good in us that arises simply because of our goodness. It all comes from God. Even faith comes from God^{□1} is wonderful when the news of many conversions gets widely known. When the people of God are as they should be, they get noticed. It made Paul grateful.

3. **Paul's gratitude also shows itself in the way he serves God.** He goes on to say: ⁹*For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, is my witness how unceasingly I make mention of you . . .* He serves God in his spirit. Some serve God only in their body. They go to church. They go to meetings. But their mind and heart are not there. This is a special danger for Christian leaders. Sometimes leaders feel they do not have to participate. They don't have to listen. They attend but they are serving only with their body. Some serve God only with their emotions, their feelings. They like music or ceremony. Paul claims to serve God in his spirit. It means that he is sincere, genuine. It means that his heart is in it.

4. **He hopes to come to Rome.** Paul assures the Christians at Rome that he is always praying for them and especially – as he says – ¹⁰*always in my prayers making request if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may be prospered in coming to you.* The Bible says we are to pray for all the saints^{□1}. We depend on each other more than we realize.

5. **Paul is conscious of God's guidance.** Romans 1:10–13 gives us a glimpse of how the guidance of God worked out in Paul's life on one particular occasion. He tells us he was always in his praying 'making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may be prospered in coming to you'. Then he goes on to tell us more of what his hopes were. ¹¹*For I am longing to see you to give to you some spiritual blessing of God's grace so that you may be established.* However, he does not want them to think that he is proud and superior so he immediately adds that he expects to receive a blessing from them as well. ¹²*And that means my being strengthened among you people through each other's faith, both yours and mine.* Then he tells them more of his plans and hopes. ¹³*And I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that many times I have planned to come to you and have been prevented up till now. I wanted to come to reap some fruit among you too, as I have among the rest of the gentiles.*

Guidance can be a difficult matter. There is uncertainty in these words of Paul. Using four Greek words he says he prays 'if perhaps at-last at-some-time'^{□1} he may get to Rome. You can see that he is speaking quite tentatively.

□1 1:1-7

□2 1:8-10

□3 1:11-13

□4 1:14-15

□1 Philippians 1:29; Matthew 16:17; Luke 17:5; Acts 11:21; 13:48; 16:14

□1

Ephesians 6:18

□1 1:10

(ii) *God does not always give us direct messages of guidance*

(iii) *There is nothing wrong with having ordinary human desires for God's kingdom*

(iv) *It is good to explore God's will in prayer*

(v) *He was governed by a sense of obligation*

• *The love of Christ controls us*

• *He has something to give and he knows that he is able to give it*

This means – secondly – that **God does not always give us direct messages of guidance**. It is clear from Paul's words here that Paul could be kept in perplexity for some time.

Thirdly, it is encouraging to note that **there is nothing wrong with having ordinary human desires for God's kingdom**. Paul wanted to come to Rome. It was part of his very great longing. God gives us a lot of freedom. He promises that if we commit our way to him, he will give us the desires of our hearts. Also, **it is right to make plans**. Paul evidently had not only intended to visit Rome; he had actually tried to do it. We are not passive people; we are to have goals and aims. However, we do not plan things in an arrogant manner.

It is good to explore God's will in prayer. This is what Paul did. He was '... always ... making request'.

Fifthly, **he was governed by a sense of obligation**. Paul had a great sense of duty. He was a debtor to everyone. ¹⁴*I am under obligation*, he says, *both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish*. He feels obliged to go to Rome. To his way of thinking he has no choice. One reason is that he sees that the gospel is so marvellous and brings such blessings. How can he possibly not share it? If you know Jesus there is something about knowing Jesus that makes you long that others should know him too. When you stumble on a good thing, it is difficult to keep quiet about it. 'I am under a compulsion,' we say. 'I have no choice. I simply must tell other people'¹.

Our love for Jesus and for people puts pressure on us. The love of Christ controls us¹. What a terrible plight the world is in without knowing it. How can we not tell them about Jesus? And the gospel is so suitable for every kind of person. It is appropriate for every kind of culture.

Paul's words imply that he has something to give and he knows that he is able to give it. The great thing about New Testament Christians is the way they spontaneously speak out what has happened to them. 'We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard', they say. Paul is ready. ¹⁵*So for my part I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome*. Someone has said that Paul could have used the words 'I am ready' as a motto for his life. The very moment he was saved he was asking the question, 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' and for the rest of his life he was ready to do anything for Jesus. Are we ready for God to interrupt our plans? Ready to confess Jesus at any moment?

¹ see 1 Corinthians 9:16

² 2 Corinthians 5:14

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