

April 13, 2015

The Loving Spirit

Romans 1:11 (NASB), ***“For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established.”***

The past few days we have been traversing through the Romans 1:8-15 in which the apostle Paul lays out some marks or characteristics of true spiritual service. We have seen that the marks are that of a thankful spirit, a concerned spirit, and a willing and submissive spirit and heart. As we come to verse 11 we see that the next mark or characteristic is that of a loving spirit.

We learn in this verse and in fact it is mentioned several times in this epistle that Paul had a deep desire to come to Rome and visit the church there. Paul wanted to come and visit in order to be of service to the church at Rome. Paul was not going to Rome as a tourist to see the famous and iconic landmarks of Rome. He wanted to travel to Rome to give of himself and be of service to the church, not to indulge himself. Years ago as myself and some others were preparing to travel to another country for a mission trip I had a deacon in the church in which I was serving at the time tell me he thought we were just going to have a vacation. While his comments were very misguided and were quite upsetting especially coming from a leader in the church, they did cause me to always be cognizant of the need of having a spirit of self-less love when I serve.

The Christian who looks on their service to the Lord as a means of receiving appreciation and personal satisfaction is going to inevitably be subject to disappointment and self-pity. But the Christian who focuses on giving never has these problems. Paul's ministry goal was very clear as it says in Colossians 1:28-29, ***“We proclaim Him admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”***

Paul's love for others is reflected in the first letter he wrote to the church in Thessalonica in 1 Thess. 2:7-9, ***“But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.”***

The primary characteristic of genuine Christian love is that of selfless giving. It was out of this kind of love that Paul assured the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 12:15, ***“I will most gladly spend and be expended for our souls.”*** Paul had not only a willingness to spend but also a willingness to use all of his resources and energy on their behalf, and a willingness to be spent was a willingness to die for them if necessary.

Paul while concerned for the Romans physical welfare was more concerned for their spiritual well-being. This is why he writes here in verse 11 that he was longing “***to see***” them so “***that***” he might “***impart***” to them “***some spiritual gift***.”

The “**gift**” that Paul longed to “**impart**” to them was “**spiritual**” not only in the sense that it was in the spiritual realm but also in the sense that it had its source in the Holy Spirit. Paul was writing to believers and because of this he was not therefore speaking of the free gift of salvation through Christ that he speaks of in Romans 5:15-16. He also was not speaking about the spiritual gifts that he discusses in chapter 12 because those gifts are bestowed directly by the Holy Spirit Himself, not through anything that we humans do. Paul by using the term “**spiritual gift**” was referring to that term in its broadest sense. It refers then to any kind of divinely-empowered “**spiritual**” benefit he could bring to the Roman Christians by preaching, teaching, exhorting, comforting, praying, guiding, and disciplining.

Whatever particular blessings that the apostle had in mind, they were not of the superficial, self-centered sort that many church members crave today. He was not interested in as it says in 2 Timothy 4, “**tickling**” their ears or satisfying their religious curiosity.

Paul’s desire was to impart to them the spiritual blessings in order for the Roman believers to “**be established**.” He wanted those brothers and sisters in Christ to as it says in Ephesians 4:15, “**to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ**.”

If we truly love the Lord and have a desire to serve Him in sincere service to His kingdom then we will like Paul have a loving spirit. This means that our greatest desire and want for others is that they will “**be established**” in their relationship with God. We will lovingly serve them not because it satisfies some need we have but rather we will serve them with a selfless love so that they can grow daily in their knowledge and understanding of Him.