

Pauls farewell to the Romans

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] I'd like if you would turn back with me this evening to the passage that we read together in Romans, the last chapter of Romans. And we do come to this point of the communion weekend where traditionally we would be giving thanks to God and rightly so for his goodness to us, not over simply the last few days but as a token of our thanksgiving for all that he has done for us.

And it's sometimes very difficult to find an appropriate theme for such a service, not because there's not a lot to give thanks for but simply to know exactly which direction to take in the sermon. But if we are thankful to God, we're thankful to him primarily because of his grace and his goodness to us and his love. And our thankfulness is an expression of our returning our thanks to him because we love him also.

And as those who love him, it's from loving hearts that we are returning our thanks. And God makes a very clear link between loving him and obeying him.

If you love me, you will obey my commandments. So we always have that close link between love being more than simply just a warm feeling or a calm emotion or something that fills our hearts so that we can say lots of nice things and say lots of right things about God in expressing our love.

[1 : 36] But he, as God recognises that love is much more than simply that, and he looks into our hearts to see the motive and then from there how our wills are moved and changed and affected by him so that the expression of our love in thanksgiving is obedient lives, serving him.

And so I would like this evening to look at the first section of this chapter, chapter 16, where we are given a picture of a New Testament church as Paul gives his greetings, his salutation, his message of love to them.

In conclusion, he mentions many people in the church and what they are doing. And it gives us a glimpse into a picture of a working, obedient, serving New Testament church.

And one that was repaying its love for Christ and with a thankful heart, serving God. And we will express our thanksgiving as Christians, not simply by attending a worship service and not simply by saying and acknowledging rightly thankfulness, but by going from such a season as this with renewed obedience and renewed desire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and to obey him.

So we see here in these words a pattern which I hope that we can be encouraged by and challenged by for our own church and for our own Christian lives.

[3 : 14] Because it's a picture of an ordinary people who have clearly got an extraordinary saviour. And that is what we look for in our own lives, that we become a people who, although very ordinary, are ones who have an extraordinary saviour.

So I would like to look at a picture of this church for a few moments this evening. And we notice one or two characteristics of this church. And of the serving people of God.

And we do notice that they were a people who were sacrificial workers for the Lord Jesus Christ. In verses 1 to 3, we are commended, Phoebe is commended, or Phoebe is commended to us, who is a servant of the church of Christ in that place.

In verse 6, we're introduced to Mary who bestowed much labour on us. And in verse 12, salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. And it's clear from these descriptions that there were a people, a nucleus, a core, who were central to the work of the gospel in that church, who were co-workers with Paul, men and women together, who were serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Both husband and wife teams, individuals who laboured hard for the Lord. We're not told in each instance the type of work they did. But they had a servant, sacrificial spirit.

[4 : 42] And that is a great model for us as Christians. Because so often we look for the church to serve us. And we look to see what we can receive from the church.

Whereas Christ, through Paul, is reminding us here that to be part of the body of Christ is to be a serving people. A people who give. A people who pour out their souls in sacrificial service for God. And in so doing, are blessed. And receive more in return than they could ever imagine. So we have, as Christians, this privilege and this pleasure of being workers for Christ.

Sacrificial workers in his kingdom. And we are to ask ourselves whether that is the case in our lives. That we are people who see our gift and who are serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our being spent for him. Our pouring out our soul and spiritual activity. Looking for ways in which we can be servants of the Most High God.

[5 : 49] In the Christian community in which we live and work and worship. For Christ's sake. That is what we are asked to do. Serve Christ.

Through all the troubles and all the difficulties. And all the problems that you see. And all the hassles with people and with everything else that's in our lives. And all the things that we would like to change or not change.

Or everything that goes on around us. May it be that we are still those who are spent for Christ. Serving him. Keeping our eye on our Master.

And on our Lord. We don't serve the church as an institution. We serve Christ through his people. Through his body.

Which is the church. So here it is clear that those who love the Lord. Serve him. And serve him alongside one another.

[6 : 46] But we also noticed that it was a congregation where the homes were open. And in verse 5 we are told that the house met in their house.

The church rather. Met in their house. Priscilla and Aquila. And we know that in the New Testament. That there was many needs for houses to be opened up. Where the church met.

Because they didn't have church buildings. But the reality is that it was people in sacrificial service. Who were willing to open their own lives. And their own hearts.

And their own homes. To the ministry of the gospel. And it's been a great encouragement to witness. And to be among you. And to know that there were so many open homes.

Even over this weekend. Where there was Christian fellowship. And where Christ was spoken of. And worship and fellowship was enjoyed. And it's such a tremendous privilege.

[7 : 40] That we can serve the Lord in this way. By opening where it's possible. Where we are free to do so. And where the privilege is ours. To open our homes.

And thereby opening our hearts. To the Lord Jesus Christ. So that we have places for people. Not simply in formal gatherings like this. But where people can meet together.

And share Christian faith. And pray together. And plead for God to bless. Where practical love and hospitality can be shown. That is so important.

So vital in the day in which we live. We live in a day where increasingly. Individuals or families are broken. And divided.

And where people live. With all the people around them. In great loneliness. Where they have very few. Deep seated and true friends.

[8 : 37] And we know that often. The way to people's hearts. Through the love and commitment. And openness. Of Christian friends. That that will melt their hearts and souls.

Long before they enter God's house. And hear the word of God. Where they see. Your practical Christianity at work. Where they know of your commitment.

Where they appreciate. Your time and effort on their behalf. It is where we are able to express our grace. Not simply in worship. But as we live in the lives.

That God has placed us. And as we serve him there. That we open our hearts and our homes. And our very lives. To express the grace that we have received.

You have received much blessing over these days. And I'm sure from week to week. And our responsibility. Is to share that grace.

[9 : 33] And to serve through that. But in this window of a church. We are also reminded. That there were those.

Who became Christians in the church. There were conversions in this church. Verse 5. We are spoken of. Apenetus. Who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ. The early converts. Those who came to know Jesus Christ.

And were converted in that. Fledgling young church. The work of the spirit was evident. Paul expected his preaching. To be blessed. And to be used. And for souls to be saved. And there was in that New Testament church. A great desire. That souls would be saved. And that people would be brought to. Know the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is our hope. And I hope that that is our expectation. In this congregation. And in our own congregations. Where we come from. That the Lord God still works. And his Holy Spirit is still strong. [10:33] And as we serve. And as we obey. And as we follow. And as we walk in his steps. And as we plead for his blessing. That many souls will be saved. What a great power is in this congregation.

As you corporately pray. As you pray in your homes. As you pray together. As you pray alone. That God will bless the work of this congregation. And the preaching of the word. And the witnessing done. In the street. And in the home. And in the workplace. That we have this desire. To wrestle with God. I sometimes look into our own situations. And in our own churches. And I ask myself. As well as asking my own people. Where is our pleading? How committed are we? To crying out to God. And pleading for his blessing. And for souls to be saved. Are we fulfilling his commission. To go into all the world. Making disciples. [11:32] We know it is his work. We know it is. Only he can do that. And he is sovereign. But he cooperates. With us in this work.

He brings people in. Through the church. And through the Christian body. And through the witness. And life of the people. We are at war. And you know the Lord's table. It is not a finished feast. It is not like the feast in heaven. Where we can sit back. As it were. Spiritually and relax. It is like the Passover meal. It is to be eaten in haste. It is to be eaten with our loins girded. And with the sword by our side. As the Passover was. In readiness for movement. In readiness for action. In readiness to get on. And to serve the Lord God. And that is how we eat the Lord's Supper. It is to be a nourishing meal. [12:27] In the battle. It is to refresh us. And encourage. And build us up. So that we are in battle. Serving the Lord. On our knees.

In war. Wrestling against principalities. And powers. Wearing the armor of God. And pleading for God to bless. His work. How many people last night. Were in God's house here. Who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ. What a great privilege. That they are in God's house. But what a solemn responsibility. For your preachers. And for you as a congregation. That they don't leave God's house. Harder. And more. Separated from God. And further away from his grace. Rather that their hearts are softened. And that they are drawn to the Savior. So that there is this great work. Of people coming to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:27] And we do rejoice. And give thanks this evening. For those who did profess faith. Over this weekend. And we pray that they will be blessed. And that the spirit will protect and keep them.

But also we notice that it was a church. That was used to. And underwent persecution. Verse 7 was introduced to Adronicus and Junia.

Who were Paul's relatives. His kinsmen. Who were also his fellow prisoners. And then we are told later on. Of another who was struggling.

And troubled. And going through difficulty. In their faith. And imprisoned for their faith. And in the New Testament. It was a very real threat.

And it was a very real reality. That they would be imprisoned for their faith. We don't know that same threat. And trouble and persecution. But there is no doubt. And it is important for us all to be forearmed.

[14:24] Because being forearmed is to be forearmed. That when Christ is at work in his church. And when we are faithful to him. As a people. And as individuals. We will be tried and tested.

And opposition and difficulty will come in our lives. And it is no good that we make the pretense. That in coming to Christ. That life then is a straight and an easy road.

That we make clear. And that we know. That there is trial. And there is persecution. And there is difficulty. And there is tragedy. And there is blackness. And that we will be let down.

Not only by the world. But our fellow Christians. The people we love and trust. The deepest swords to our souls. Will be from our brothers and sisters. In Christ.

There will be testings and trials. And our own particular imprisonments. Which we face in Christ. And as a church being aware.

[15:23] That there may be brothers and sisters. Who are going through trial. And opposition. Brothers and sisters who are weak. Who are tired. Who are troubled.

Who are full of doubt. Who hear of all the joy. And the pleasure. And the privilege. That people have enjoyed over the weekend. And go home. And look in the mirror. And say. Well why isn't it me? I'm empty. I've received nothing from God's house. And I've received no blessing. Who are alone and afraid. As one another. We need to be strengthening.

And encouraging each other. Building one another up. We can only do that. As we are leaning on. And knowing. And serving one another. It's so very easy for us.

In our human nature. Saved as it is. To do the opposite. It's easy to tear down. It's easy to discourage. It's easy to find fault. Any fool can do that.

[16:20] But to build up. To encourage. To be beside the failed. And the troubled. And the weak. That is where we are asked. To pour out. Our grace.

And our commitment. To one another. Because we notice also. In this picture. That it is. A great closeness.

That Paul. Is sharing. With these. People. This is. They are no strangers to him. In the time that he worked. And preached there.

He has built. A great bond. Of love. And friendship. With these people. Some of them are his relatives. Some of them are his family. And many of them.

Are his friends. And this great picture. Reminds us. That we are drawn together. Under the umbrella of Christ. And we become family.

[17:16] And it is a covenant. Picture. That we are given here. One that works right through. The Bible. That where Christ works. He works in family.

And he works in covenant. And we believe in infant baptism. And in the promises that that holds. For our children. As they are brought up. In the nurture and admonition. Of the Lord.

And so there is this great picture. Of young people. Growing up. With God's house. In God's house. With God's people. Of corporate responsibility.

Of fatherly. Motherly parenting. Of the young. Of concern. And of young and old. Together. In this deep. And meaningful relationship.

So often for us. Our experiences in church. Can be shallower. With our fellow Christians. And it can be passing. Acquaintances.

[18:13] And yet we are asked. By his grace. To show. And to share love. The love of Christ. With one another. In such a way.

As we would naturally. With our families. That we are to. Recognize. All the different. Types. And ages.

And experiences. And strong. And weak. And old. And young. And needy. And independent. And all that we have. And that we build. In a.

Committed. Environment. Environment. Of family love. And friendship. And fellowship. And the great blessing. Of. Pleading God's covenant.

For our children. There's a great. Encouragement. Last night. Speaking at the youth fellowship. With 40 or 50. Teenage. Children. Willing to listen.

[19:10] Children. And many of whom. Had come. Straight to that. Youth fellowship. From the prayer meeting. Here. In church. Pray for your young people. They are very precious.

And they. Are very. Precious. Pray for them. Uphold them. Don't discourage them. Don't knock them down. Don't expect them. To be giants.

In the faith. Allow them to grow. And to know Christ. And to be encouraged. As they. Build their. Relationship with him.

So in summing up. The picture. That we have. We have. Two clear. Emphasis. That. Comes across. From Paul's.

Personal. Salutation. His greetings. To this church. We have a people together. And we have a people together. In Christ.

[20 : 06] We have a people together. And that is a. Greatly. Significant. And important. New. Testament. Theological. Truth.

That God. Saves us. Into. A kingdom. Into a family. Into a body. We are the body of Christ. And we are not saved.

To an island. We are not saved. To independent. Christian living. We don't become. Those who. Are. On our own.

We are drawn. Yes. With all her faults. And all her mistakes. And all her frustrations. Drawn into the body of Christ. Of whom we are a part.

And we rise. We stand and fall. With God's people. And we are to be a people. Loyal together. In fellowship. And in body ministry.

[21 : 03] In serving the Lord Jesus Christ. United. And working through. Our problems. And our trials. And our difficulties. And our frictions. And all the things.

That make up families. And unity. And people together. And work through them. Under. Jesus Christ. You know. I don't think we value enough. The unity.

That the New Testament. Preaches. Paul says there. In verse 17. Now I beseech you brethren. Mark them. Which cause divisions. And offenses. Contrary to the doctrine. You have learned. And avoid them.

It's not a. Spineless unity. It's not a unity. At all costs. But it's a unity. That comes under. The sovereignty.

And the headship. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we have short fuses. When Christ cause. And when truth.

[22 : 03] Or in the name of truth. When division is caused. We recognize and know. We are a people. Together. And our aim. And our vision. Is to work. Together.

And work for the glory of God. For the salvation of souls. And for the shepherding. Of the souls. That are. Together. Under. God's grace.

In this place. Through good. And through bad. Through good report. And evil report. That we persevere. In serving the Lord Jesus Christ. In unity.

Whoever we are. Whatever our background. And whatever our status. You know. One of the greatest things. About this list. It's a tremendous list.

It's a personal list. It's a list. It's a list. It's a list where we are only given. First names. There's nothing about rank. There's nothing about status. Nothing about occupation.

[23 : 00] Social standing. Wealth. Tradition. What faction in the church. What background they belong to. There is this great. Unity. And oneness in Christ. We don't know.

Everything that goes on. Behind that. Particular church. But there's unity. And there's closeness. And there's fellowship. And there is a common purpose. As Paul encourages them.

To keep on working. To keep on serving. To look forward. And serve the Lord Jesus Christ. In Rome. And build this church. Often.

We find. In our own experiences. That the church can reflect. The prejudices. And the divisions. And the. Status.

And the selfishness. Of the world. These things. Can all be left outside. As we are one. In Christ. It's a people together. But much more importantly.

[23 : 57] Than that. It is a people together. In Christ. Ten times. In these few verses. We have the words. In the Lord. In the Lord. Paul.

Increasingly. Says it again. And again. In the Lord. Each one. In the Lord. All who are in the Lord. He is stressing that. Because it's a vital. Theological.

Connection. For Paul. That these people. Aren't simply. A gathering. Of like-minded. Individuals. They're not people. Who are just. An ordinary. Gathering.

Or an ordinary. Organization. Or organization. They are a people. Who are in Christ. And who are a people. Together in Christ. Looking to Christ. Serving Christ.

Obedying Christ. Holy in Christ. Repentant through Christ. Faith in Christ. And Christ is the center. And you know. That is what connects us. With every other.

[24 : 53] Christian denomination. And it's what sets us apart. From any other. Human organization. Because we are. Primarily. Spiritual. And our head. Is the Lord.

Jesus Christ. And we are his servants. We were reminded. Yesterday morning. That we are bought. Yes. But we are bought. With a price. We are no longer. Our own.

We just simply. Can't walk our own way. Because we are the Lord's. And we. Have been bought. To serve him. Set free. To serve. To serve. The Lord Jesus Christ. And that leaves us. With a great responsibility. To be those. Who are together. But together. In Christ. Christ. And so I encourage you. As I close. To be those. Who are Christians. Who live in Christ.

Duty. To submit to him. Yes. I know. We all submit. In the things. Where it's easy. For us to do so. But where we are. Greatly tempted.

[25 : 49] Where our weaknesses. Where our particular. Pet sins lie. These are the places. And these are the areas. Where his headship. Must.

Control. Our hearts. And our lives. That we have this. Personal duty. Of following. And serving. And obeying. The Lord Jesus Christ. Because we are an army. And we all have.

Our shields. To protect us. Like the Roman army. And these shields. As in the Roman army. We're all linked together. But if one of these shields. Is down. Then there is immediately. An Achilles heel. And the army. Is weakened. And so we. In Christ's church. In Christ's company. In Christ's body. If we. Are not in Christ.

If we have drifted. If we have backslidden from him. Then. That. Affects. Everybody. We have this personal duty. To be living our lives.

[26 : 49] In the strength of the spirit. In the Lord. Living in him. Also. Fellowshiping. In his name. Working together. Sharing. In his name.

Our faith. Together. Speaking. About Christ. Together. It's a great privilege. To do that. And it's something. That sometimes. Can be very difficult.

For us to do. Sadly. Among our fellow Christians. We can talk about. Our families. And we can talk about. Church. And politics. And politics. In the church. But sometimes.

We struggle. To speak about. The Rose of Sain. Our beloved. Savior. We dry up. We've got nothing much to say.

And yet. We are to fellowship. Not simply. Being with one another. Fellowship. Isn't simply. Being with other Christians. Because Christians. Can sin together.

[27 : 44] And Christians. Can gossip together. And can destroy. Together. And can pull one another down. But it is. Fellowshiping. In his name.

In the Lord. And. Be united in that cause. And as Christians. To simply also. Witness. In his name. Longing that others. Will confess. The name of Jesus Christ. Who we have confessed. Not content. Simply. With.

What we have. We have. A heaven. To gain. We have to tell people. Of a heaven. To gain. And a hell. To shun. The Lord.

Has placed you. Somewhere. Where nobody else. Can be. You have. Contacts. Nobody else has. And he wants. You to tell them.

[28 : 40] About Jesus. To share with them. The gospel. Because it's real. To you. Is it? Because it's real. And because.

We know. That there is a day. Of reckoning. And that there is a saviour. Who loves. The seriousness. Of their spiritual condition. The shortness of time.

Urgently. Seeking. To bring in the lost. In. Christ's name. Sharing. The gospel. Not ramming the gospel. Down people's throats.

So that it turns them off. But sharing the gospel. But sharing the gospel. In gentleness. And with respect. Looking for God. To open the doors of opportunity.

For us to do so. It's a great picture. Of a church. And may it be. As we leave. Our blessed time together. That as.

[29 : 35] A mark of our thanksgiving. That we seek. To. Model ourselves. On the New Testament church. More. And more. That. We're not content to say.

We've arrived. And that we have. What we have. And we will retain that. But simply. And consistently. And as individuals. And as a church. Being sanctified.

Moving forward. Becoming closer. To the Lord Jesus Christ. And showing our thankfulness. By sacrificial. Lives.

Of obedient service. See how they love one another. And if you love me. You will obey. My commandments. Amen.

Let us pray together. O Lord our God. We ask and pray. That we might indeed.

[30 : 29] Recognize. Our need for forgiveness. In our own lives. That we would constantly see. That. We stand. We fall short of the mark.

Even by our own standards. And we. Constantly. Need. To allow. Christ. And his spirit. To mold us. Into his image. Drawing us closer. To himself. Marking us out. As those. Whose love. Affects our wills. And affects. Our.

Lives. At every level. Lord. We pray. Particularly. This evening. For this congregation. And specifically. We pray. With a special burden.

For the young people. And the children. We ask. That Lord God. In these days. That you would protect them. That you would love them. And that they would be loved here. That they would be happy.

[31 : 27] In God's house. That they would know. That they are loved. And belong. That they would hear. About Jesus Christ. In a way. That they understand. That they would be nurtured. And developed.

And encouraged. In their young faith. And they would. That they would know. Family and friendship here. That will be a magnificent.

Witness to them. And a great encouragement. Drawing them to Jesus Christ. And we pray Lord. That like Jesus. Who had such a desire.

For children. And wished that. People would be drowned. In the sea. Rather than. Cause any offense. To them. That we too.

Would have that same. Protective. And loyal. Concern and care. That our lives. Bear no hypocrisy. And have no double standards.

[32 : 25] And do not give rise. For any. Excuse. Among those. Who are lost. To stay away from Christ. Oh Lord God.

We give thanks. We give thanks. For all that we are. And all that we. Have been given. By grace. And we return our thanks. To heaven. And ask that our lives.

Would be humble. And sacrificial. And that we would see ourselves. At best. As unprofitable servants. Take away any wrong spirit.

That might be in our hearts. Or souls. At any time. And grant us. To be full of grace. And full. Of Christ.

For we ask it in his precious name. Amen.