

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Romans 1. This letter is very autobiographical, very personal. Paul is revealing his personality, revealing his heart to them. In fact, in these verses today we are going to find the first personal pronouns "I", "me" or "my" 17 times. Now, that's not like Paul. I haven't counted it, but I would guess he doesn't use it 17 times in the rest of the book. So, here he is saying, "I want you to see my heart." Today as we talk about the heart of the apostle, Paul, I am going to be asking you to consider what's in your heart today. What is in the heart of a believer?

Let's begin reading here in Romans 1:7. The first 6 verses is his introduction of who he is, and then he says, "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." That's his signature. He always said, "Grace and peace to you." It's never peace and Grace because you never find God's *peace* until you find his *grace*. Look at the first part of verse 7. He says, "To all of you who are loved by God and called." You can just mark out the words 'to be' because they are not in the original language. It literally says "called saints." I say that because there is a real misconception in the world today about who the saints are. Many of you think it is a practice of the Roman Catholic Church to award sainthood to certain individuals who have been dead for like a hundred years who have performed some kind of notable sacrificial service. Those are the people we sometimes call "saints." That's why if you have a King James Bible it says, "St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. John, St. Luke," because these are men who had been awarded sainthood. But that is wrong. Sainthood is not restricted to those who died.

My wife and I just returned from a wonderful little vacation over in Europe. We visited a lot of cathedrals, and I was amazed to see all of the cathedrals are named after St. This and St. That. There are so many saints. A saint is not somebody who is dead and has been exalted by the Catholic Church. A saint is any believer who is alive right now and exalts Jesus Christ. Paul is not writing to dead Christians. He is writing to people who are living and breathing. There were alive. We are saints today. When you hear the song "When the saints go marching in, I hope to be in that number," all you have to do is know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and you will be numbered with the saints. So it is correct for me to say, "St. Mike, and St. Jim" except in the Bible no individual is called saint, it is always used in the plural sense. Saints together, set apart for God's service. So, that's who the letter is written to. Now, let's begin reading in verse 8 and see what Paul writes:

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be open for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. I am obligated [and the word means "in debt, a

debtor"] both to Greeks and to non-Greeks [the word is barbarian] both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome."

I believe Paul was a great Christian. He, himself, wrote in one of his letters to the church at Corinth, "Be imitators of me!" Now, that is quite a statement for a man to say, "I want you to imitate me!" The reason he could say that was because Jesus Christ was living in him, and they did not have a New Testament like we have today to learn what Jesus was like. So, when I say, "Let's look and see what was in his heart." we're going to be using him as a comparison to all of us because what was in his heart that we see in these verses ought to be in our hearts.

I. GRATEFUL HEART

A saint has a thankful heart. That's how he begins. Look at verse 8 again. "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you." At this point Paul had never been to Rome. He didn't know most of the Christians in Rome. He knew a number of them we read about in Romans 16, but most of them, he didn't know but he had heard about them. Their reputation spread throughout the Roman Empire. This group of believers in Rome had a lot of faith, and so he said, "I thank God for you and your faith." By the way, that's happening today as I travel around, you would be amazed at how many people I meet say to me, "Oh, I have heard of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, and I thank God for the faith that you people have." The same thing said of the church in Rome is being said of our church today.

How thankful are you? 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Sometimes people say, "Well, I want to know what God's will is. What's God's will?" Well, there it is in black and white. It is God's will for you and for me to give thanks in all circumstances. Now, when we are talking about the heart of the believer, I want to give you a "heart" text today. I'm not talking about an arteriogram or a catheterization that determines the condition of the pumping organ in your chest; I'm talking about what the condition of the control center of your life is, your *heart*.

Test: Am I giving thanks in all things?

Here's question number one of the heart test: Am I giving thanks in all things? That's for you to answer. The key there is "giving" thanks, because I have told you before there is a big difference between feeling thankful and giving or expressing thanks. I'm sure many people feel thankful for a lot of different things and to a lot of different people, but you don't give thanks until you express that thanks to God and to others. I know all many people do is look for the negative. They gripe and they pick, and they can only see the bad things, but a thankful person who has the attitude of gratitude always looks for the good things to thank God about.

Paul could have picked out all the bad things about living in Rome, because they had many problems: slavery, pornography, unemployment, divorce, drug abuse and alcoholism to name a few. He could have talked about all these things, but he said, "I just thank God for the good things I am hearing about your church."

One of the many things I admire about my wife is that she is faithful writer of thank you notes. She believes in writing them, and I thank God she has taught my daughters to write them as well. It's a good way to show people you appreciate them. Have you ever thought about writing a thank you note to God? You could take a piece of paper someday and write at the top, "Dear God, I want to thank you for..." and then start writing down some things you want to thank him for. Just make it a thank you note for the Lord, it's a good way to express the thankfulness that ought to be in your heart.

II. PRAYING HEART

His heart was characterized with a heart of prayer. If you look at the last part of verse 9 and the first part of verse 10 he says, "I remember you in my prayers at all times." Paul was saying, "I pray for you all the time." Paul was the one who made the statement, "Pray without ceasing." Sometimes when people hear this idea about praying without ceasing, they just cannot understand it, because to some people prayer is an act: Bow your head, close your eyes, and perhaps get on your knees. But for people who really know Jesus, prayer is not just an act, it's a constant attitude. For some people prayer is a religious ritual you go through whether you are genuflecting or kneeling or going through some kind of motions or folding your hands, it is a religious ritual. For the apostle Paul, it was just part of his ongoing relationship with God and was as natural as taking the next step when he was walking and taking in the next breath when he was breathing. He constantly lived in communion with the Lord.

There's a great verse from Philippians 4:6 which says, "Do not be anxious about anything." That means don't worry. If I could put it in the East Texas vernacular, it says, "Don't worry about nothin'!" "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God." What the Bible says is, "on one extreme you have worry and anxiety, and on the other extreme you have prayer, prayer of faith, prayer of thanksgiving." The truth is when you are worrying it's impossible to pray, but when you are praying, it's impossible to worry.

Test: Do I pray more than I worry?

Here's your heart test: Do I pray more than I worry? Only you can answer that. Let me make it a little easier for you. What if God sent an angel down unaware to you and this angel followed you around for 24 hours, and every moment you worried, the angel wrote it down and for every moment you prayed the angel also wrote it down? At the end of 24 hours would there be more in the worry column, or more in the prayer column? Only you can answer that. The Bible says, "Don't be anxious about anything, but pray, pray."

People often ask me if I think worry is a sin. I say, "Absolutely." I think worry is a sin. In fact I believe it is the number one sin committed by people who call themselves Christians, because I have known people who say they love the Lord, but they worry about finances, they worry about their health, they worry about their family. Every time you worry, what you are saying is, "God, you are a liar!" You are saying, "God, you cannot be trusted!" God said I'll never leave you or forsake you. God says I'll always give you the strength that you need, my Grace is sufficient, and every time you worry you say, "No, God, I can't trust what you have just said to me."

Some of you have heard the story about the worrywart. He worried about everything. His brow was always furrowed and his back was always bent. One Monday he came into work and suddenly a smile appeared on his face. It seemed the world had been lifted from his shoulders. He even had a spring in his step! One of his coworkers said, "Man, what's different about you? You used to worry about everything. You look so happy right now. What's the secret?" The worrywart said, "Oh, I hired a guy to worry for me and all he does it worry for me and I pay him to do that. It's great! You wouldn't believe it, it's just great!" His coworker said, "Well, how much are you paying this guy?" He said, "Five thousand dollars a week." His coworker said, "Wait a minute, you don't even make five thousand dollars a week! How in the world are you going to pay him?" The guy said, "That's not my worry. That's his." The truth is you do have somebody, the Bible says, who is already borne your burdens. He has already carried your sorrows, so you don't have to worry. Pray instead. Paul was not a worrier, he was a pray-er.

III. SUBMISSIVE HEART

He also had a submissive heart. He submitted to the will of God. Look at the last part of verse 10. "I pray now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you." He says, "Listen, I want to come to Rome. I haven't been able to come yet, but within God's will, I want to come to Rome." In other words, Paul was the kind of guy when he made a decision it was always parenthesized, had parentheses around it, saying according to God's will. He never made a plan without saying, "If this is God's will." That ought to be our desire, to do only those things which are God's will. I like what the psalmist said in Psalm 48: "I desire to do your will oh my God. Your law is within my heart."

Test: Do I frequently ask, "Is this God's will?"

All right, here's the test: Only you can answer this. Do I frequently ask, "Is this God's will?" In other words whenever you are faced with a decision, (it doesn't have to be a major one) do you ever stop and say, "Is this God's will?" For those of you in our church who have taken "Experiencing God" written by Henry Blackaby, the one thing that usually slaps you in the face is toward the beginning of that study when Henry Blackaby says, "This is the wrong question." The wrong question is, "What is God's will for my life?" You look at that, and say, "Well, that sounds pretty good to me and sounds pretty spiritual." He says, "That's wrong because the focus is on your life. He says the wrong question is, "What is God's will for my life?" The correct question is "What is God's will question-mark." In other words just what is God's will? That's a big point because God's will then becomes the focus and you take your life and you bring your life in connection with God's will. You see there is a lot of "junk" being taught about the will of God today. Some of the worst heresy being taught today is that some people teach whatever happens is God's will. Some say, "Whatever happens, well it's God's will" A tornado kills a bunch of people. "Well, it's just God's will." In fact, the insurance companies say, "It's an Act of God." Wait a minute! The Bible never teaches that everything happening on planet earth is God's will. In fact, I'll show you without a doubt the opposite is true. You say, "How can you do that?" Just remember the model prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name." He comes to this section and he says, "Pray this way." "Your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." Now, everything that happens in heaven is

God's will, but if everything that happens on earth is God's will, why do you think Jesus would have taught us to pray for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven? Everything that happens is not God's will. We have to pray for it to happen, and then we have to obey God's will so God's will is done on earth. So, Paul was the kind of guy he submitted to the will of God and that is what we ought to be doing also.

IV. UNSELFISH HEART

Paul had what we could call a "giving" heart, a giving heart, an unselfish heart. Look at verse 11? He says, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong." What he was saying was, "I want to come to Rome because I want to give you something." He says, "What I'm going to give you is a spiritual gift. When you read that term "spiritual gift," some people say, "Well, I'm thinking about spiritual gifts like the gift of teaching, the gift of wisdom that it talks about in Romans 1:12 and I Corinthians. Is that the kind of gift he is talking about?" No. Only the Holy Spirit gives those kinds of spiritual gifts. Paul is just using the words "spiritual gift" to contrast it with a material gift. He says, "I'm not going to give you a material gift, but I am going to give you a spiritual gift." And what was it? Well, keep reading in verse 12. He says, "that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other." He said, "I'm going to come, and I am going to encourage you. I'm going to give you a gift to make you strong, and also you're going to encourage me."

The whole reason we come to church is to give encouragement to others. Have you learned yet that it is better to give than to receive? Who said that? Jesus. But if you look in Matthew, Luke, Mark and John to try to find Jesus saying that, you won't find it. Those words of Jesus are only quoted in the book of Acts by the apostle Paul when he is speaking to the Ephesian elders. "In every thing I did, I showed you by this kind of hard work that we must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus himself when he said, "It is more blessed to give, than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

Paul said, "I want to come to Rome to give you something."

Test: Am I in church to give or to get something?

Are you ready for the heart test? Am I in church to give or to get something? As I've pastured through the years, I sometimes talk to people who are disgruntled or may have dropped out of church. I just ask them, "What happened, why aren't you in church anymore?" They almost always say the same thing. Maybe you have even said this: "Oh, I just don't get anything out of it." (Emphasis on the word "get.") "I don't get anything out of the music. I don't get anything out of the preaching. I don't get anything out of Sunday School." Well, that's the problem right there. They're so stinking selfish that's all they're looking for, to get something out of it! Those kinds of folks are going to be disappointed most of the time.

If the reason you come to church is to get something, you'll be disappointed a lot of the time. Jesus said, "It's more blessed to give than to receive." If the reason you come to church is to give something, and that's the real motive for your coming to church—you say, "Give what? Giving money again?"—Well, that's just one part of it. Give your offering, give praise to the Lord, give

encouragement to one another; give strength, help and friendship. Whatever people need, you give it to them. If you come to church saying, "I'm coming to see what I can give" I promise you, you will seldom make the statement, "I didn't get much out of it" because when you give, you will receive. Paul says, "That's why I am coming, I want to give you a spiritual gift."

V. PERSISTENT HEART

Paul had what we call a persistent heart. He was so persistent he refused to give up. Look at verse 13 again: "I don't want you to be unaware, brother, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now)." What he was saying was, "I've never been to Rome, but I want to come to Rome, I have planned it many times, but for some reason either the Lord or the devil or whatever circumstances, I just haven't been able to come, but I'm going to keep on planning to come." He refused to give up on his dream and his drive to go to Rome. By the way, it is almost misleading when he says, "I have been prevented from doing so until now" because as he's writing this he is thinking he's going to get to go to Rome soon. He didn't. If you read the book of Acts, before he ever got to go to Rome he was taken to Jerusalem where he was arrested, and then he was in prison in Caesarea for two years. When he finally got to Rome, do you know how he got there? Not as a missionary, it was as a prisoner in chains that he finally got to Rome. But when Paul got there he said, "Praise God, I am here! I finally made it. Here I am. I told you I'd come, and here I am. Even though I am a prisoner, I am here." He was so persistent he refused to give up. I want you to understand there is great value in persistence.

In fact, you'd be surprised. Some of the greatest things ever accomplished in this world have simply been accomplished because people refused to quit. A big oak tree is nothing more than an acorn that refused to give ground. It just hung on. There's great value in persistence. One of my favorite verses is Galatians 6:9. In fact when I write a letter to some of my preacher friends, I usually sign it Galatians 6:9: "Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest [here's the key] if we do not give up."

Test: Have I given up in any area of God-led service?

Here's your heart test: Have I given up in any area of God-led service? Has God led me to do something in my past, and I just quit. I gave up on it. I want to tell you there is great value in persistence.

There is a true story about a man in the early 1960s who retired at 65. All he had was an old Cadillac convertible and a pension check of \$105 a month and a recipe for frying chicken that used assorted herbs and spices. Well, he soon discovered he was not going to be able to live on \$105 a month, even in the early sixties. He decided he would probably try to sell his chicken recipe so he went to a restaurant and offered to sell this recipe to a restaurant owner, but the owner said, "I'm not interested." So, he went to another restaurant, and that restaurant owner said, "I'm not interested." He went to a third restaurant owner who said, "I'm not interested." He went to a fourth, fifth, sixth and got the same answer. He went to 1,008 restaurants and every one of them said, "No, not interested." But, in restaurant number 1,009, the owner said, "Yes, I think I will try it." It took him two years, and after two years he only had five restaurants using his

recipe, but by the year 1963 there were 600 restaurants frying his chicken. In 1964 he was bought out by a millionaire in Kentucky who made him a multimillionaire and until he died in 1990, Colonel Harlan Sanders was the image of Kentucky Fried Chicken. My friend, every time you "lick your fingers," I want you to think about how the first 1,008 restaurants turned him down, but he did not quit. There is great value in persistence.

VI. OBLIGATED HEART

There is one final characteristic I want you to see. Paul had an obligated heart. We see that in verse 14. He said, "I am obligated both to Greeks and to non-Greeks, both to the wise and to the foolish." Because he is obligated, what is he going to do? He says, "That is why I am so eager to preach the good news." Now, if you had been alive during these days, you would have understood the powerful influence of the Greek culture, the Hellenization of the world. Those of you who study history understand. To the Greeks who were cultured, sophisticated and educated, there were only two kinds of people on earth: the Greeks and the barbarians (non-Greeks). In fact, the word barbarian is an onomatopoeic word, which means the word sounds like its meaning. We get the word *barbarian* because to everyone who didn't speak Greek, foreigners sounded like they were saying, "bar-bar-bar-bar-bar." That is where we get our word barbarian. So to the Greeks there were only two classes of people, the Greeks and the barbarians. But, Paul says, "Listen, I am obligated both to those educated, cultured Greek sophisticates, but I am also obligated to the people who are barbarians. Everybody needs the good news about Jesus Christ."

Test: Do I give credit to those who have helped me?

I want to finish today by asking you this heart question: Do I give credit to those who have helped me? Am I actively giving them credit? That what he meant when he said, "I am indebted. I am obligated. [There have been people who have touched me] both Greeks and non-Greeks and so as a result I am going to help others."

CONCLUSION

During the Vietnam War there was a fighter pilot named Charles Plumb. He flew fighter jets off of the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. He flew 75 successful missions, but on his 76th mission his fighter jet was the target of a surface-to-air missile and his jet exploded into flames, but he pulled the ejection handle in time, popped up into the air, and his parachute deployed and he floated safely to the ground uninjured. But he landed in the middle of enemy territory. He was captured, and for six years he was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. He wondered at times if he would even survive his imprisonment, but he did. When the war was over, he was reunited with his family, became a successful business man and later, a motivational speaker. One evening not too many years ago he was in a restaurant in southern California and a man at the table next to him whom he did not recognize turned and said, "Hey, you're Charles Plumb, aren't you? You flew a fighter jet off of the Kitty Hawk carrier didn't you?" Charles says, "That's right. How do you know me?" The man said "You don't know this, but before every mission you flew, I was the man who packed your parachute. I guess it worked, didn't it?" Charles Plumb said, "Yes, it did! I guess I am alive because of you." They spoke and Charles Plumb went back to sit down and eat his dinner, but he couldn't eat. He kept thinking about this guy over at the other table who had

saved his life and he didn't even know it. He began to think about his days back on the Kitty Hawk, and he said there were probably times he saw that sailor, but he never once said, "Hello, or Good morning," or introduced himself, because he was a great, big fighter pilot and that guy was just a lowly sailor. As he sat there in the course of just a few moments he thought about how that man's packing of his parachute had saved his life. Then he thought about those days in the POW camp and how he also needed an emotional parachute to survive the loneliness. He thought about how his family had really packed his emotional parachute to prepare him for those days of separation. He thought about the mental parachute that he needed there in prison and how his officers and trainers packed his mental parachute to prepare him mentally to meet all the hours and hours of brutal interrogation. Then he thought about how there had been people who had most valuably packed his spiritual parachute because he said the one thing that kept us going in prison was our faith in God. He thought about those preachers, Sunday School teachers and chaplains who had packed his spiritual parachute. Suddenly, he realized he had never expressed his thanks to any of those people. So he got up and went over to that guy, and he said, "Listen, man, I'm sorry I never told you, but I just want to thank you for saving my life." And he bought his dinner. As soon as he got back home he sat down and wrote a letter to every family member he could think of telling them he wanted to thank them for packing his emotional parachute because they saved his life. Then he wrote a letter to all of the officers and trainers he could remember and he said, "I want to thank you for packing my mental parachute, because you saved my life." Then he wrote a letter to those pastors, Sunday School teachers and chaplains and he said, "I want to thank you for packing my spiritual parachute because you saved my life." Suddenly, he realized he was in debt to all these people.

I started to say, "Few of you have ever been in a POW camp, but after the first service today, a man came up and said, "Somebody packed my parachute and I was a prisoner of war in Germany. I was freed 52 years ago." I never thanked that guy for packing my parachute. So, who knows? But it's probably safe to say, most of you have never been in a POW camp, but there have been people who have packed your parachutes mentally, emotionally and spiritually. My question to you is, "Have you ever even thanked them for that?" All of you who hear this sermon this morning, I want you to go out and I want you to tell people today and next week, "Hey, thanks for packing my parachute!" They'll say, "What in the world are you talking about?" Tell them the story. We are in debt to those who have helped us.

OUTLINE

I. GRATEFUL HEART (v. 8)

...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. *1 Thessalonians 5:18*

TEST: Am I giving thanks in all things?

II. PRAYING HEART (v. 9)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. *Philippians 4:6*

TEST: Do I pray more than I worry?

III. SUBMISSIVE HEART (v. 10)

I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. *Psalms 40:8*

TEST: Do I frequently ask, "Is this God's will?"

IV. UNSELFISH HEART (v. 11)

"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" *Acts 20:35*

TEST: Am I in church to give or to get something?

V. PERSISTENT HEART (v. 13)

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. *Galatians 6:9*

TEST: Have I given up in any area of God-led service?

VI. OBLIGATED HEART (v. 14)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. *1 John 3:16*

TEST: Do I give credit to those who have helped me?



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes