

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

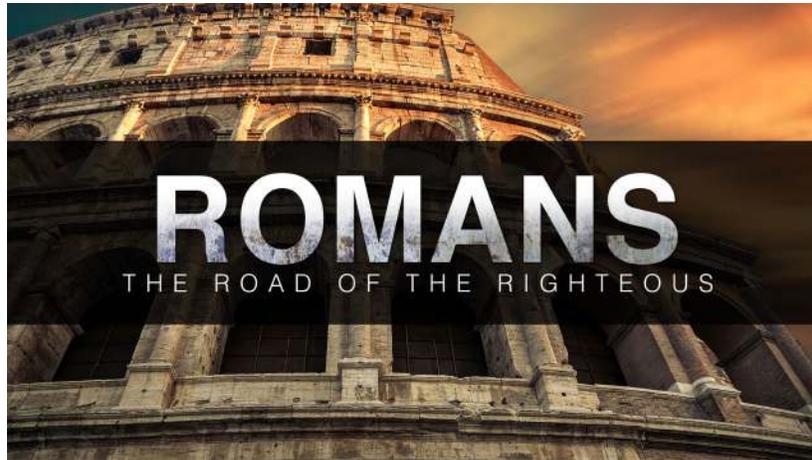
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 15:22-33

Written By

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Paul puts spiritual maturation in bold relief in his words to the Corinthians:

¹⁸ All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3).

Key here are three words: “gazing,” “being transformed” and “image.”

“Gazing” is from *katoptrizo*, (κατοπτρίζω), and it speaks of looking in a mirror and seeing your reflection. The present tense tells us it is something saints are called to do 24/7/365. Who are we gazing at constantly? Jesus and His glory. How do we do this? We do this as we think of Him, pray to Him, and read His inspired Word and study and analyze Him.

What happens as we do this? The second verbal concept gives us the answer. The verbal word is one you probably know; *metamorphoumetha* (μεταμορφούμεθα). To morph is to be radically changed into another form per Danker’s lexicon.

μεταμορφώω [μετά, μορφώω] in NT only pass. ‘undergo complete alteration’, be changed – a. w. focus on character and personhood (‘transformed’) Ro 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18. – b. w. focus on alteration of appearance (‘transfigured’) Mt 17:2; Mk 9:2.

The verb is a present tense denoting this radical change is a constant thing, and the passive nature of the verb means the change is coming from an outside force. That force to change us into a new

spiritual being is, as Paul says, “as from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Translated, the Spirit of God, who is the Lord/divine One uses His power to move us toward holiness.

The third word of importance is *icon* (εἰκών). Friberg’s Analytical Greek Lexicon reminds us how in ancient times this word represented a coin which represented the master coin/template from which it was formed:

[Fri] εἰκών, ὄνομα, ἡ (1) as an artistic representation, such as on a coin or statue *image, likeness* (MT 22.20); (2) as an embodiment or living manifestation of God *form, appearance* (CO 1.15); (3) as a visible manifestation of an invisible and heavenly reality *form, substance* (HE 10.1).

The *icon* in Paul’s mind here is Jesus or His holy character.

Taking all of these words and linking them together as Paul does here gives us the goal of each believer, coupled with the process for reaching said goal. Once we are saved we are to behold Jesus our Lord; to think about Him, to study Him carefully, to sing to Him and so forth, and as we do this, His Spirit works to cause us to mature in the faith, to look less like ourselves and more like our Lord.

Our study of Romans has given each of us ample opportunity to study Jesus, has it not? We certainly studied the rich doctrines of the book; however, those concepts were/are built on the foundation and person of Jesus, our Savior. Because this is so, this entire two-year study was all about two things: one, calling non-Christians to become Christians by placing their faith in the person and work of Jesus, and two, to call Christians to so study the image of the Lord contained in this book so they move from spiritual immaturity to maturity. Or to tap into Paul’s imagery in Corinthians the goal is to move to a greater glow of God’s glory in your life as your life aligns and reflects His.

In light of all of this, I must ask you, “How is your glory glow?”

A follow-up question logically flows from this . . .

What Are The Earmarks Of A Growing, Godly Christ-follower? (Rom. 15:14-33)

Paul lets us know in his parting words to the saints in Rome just what a maturing believer looks like.

- *Earmark #1: He Possesses A Positive Attitude* (Rom. 15:14). Are you building or blasting believers around you?
- *Earmark #2: He Possesses A Powerful Calling* (Rom. 15:15-16). What is your call?
- *Earmark #3: He Glories In How God Uses Him To Reach Others* (Rom. 15:17-19).
- *Earmark #4: He Is Consumed With A Particular Gospel Vision* (Rom. 15:20-21). Who or what is God calling you to where the gospel is concerned?

Four more earmarks readily emerge from Paul’s closing remarks:

Earmark #5: He Has A Big Gospel Goal (Rom. 15:22-24a)

Highly productive people set and achieve goals throughout their whole life. McChesney, Covey, and Huling point this out in their great leadership book *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*.¹

Discipline 1: Focus on the wildly important requires you to go against your basic wiring as a leader and focus on less so that your team can achieve more.

The authors talk about how the whirlwind of a given day will tempt you to act upon the urgent; however, as you are deeply committed to your WIG you will be positioned to be a high performer and goal achiever. Jim Collins and Jerry Porras call this goal setting by a different name in their book *Built To Last*: BHAG, or a Big Hairy Audacious Goal. Show them a successful company and they'll show you one committed to one, at the most, two off-the-charts goals. Spiritually, Paul had the corner on this concept 2,000 years prior to these great leadership books. Listen and learn from the master:

²² For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you; ²³ but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you ²⁴ whenever I go to Spain—

Contextually, Paul has just shared his life goal: to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to places and people who had never heard about it or him.

Was he successful? Snappy answer: Was Paul from Tarsus? Was Paul a tentmaker by trade? You bet Paul was successful. True, he says he was hindered in coming to the saints in Rome in his quest to fulfill his life goal, yet this should not be seen in a negative sense. The Greek for hinder can have a negative connotation. For instance, it can reference how Satan opposes the advancement of the gospel (Gal. 5:7; 1 Thess. 2:18). Paul certainly had his Satanic oppositional moments, did he not?

- Jews from Antioch and Iconium instigated Paul's stoning in Lystra on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:19).
- Greek philosophers, for the most part, mocked and derided Paul on Mars Hill on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:16ff).
- At Ephesus during his third missionary journey, Paul started a riot when the gospel cut into the profits of those who manufactured silver shrines for Diana/Artemis, the goddess of fertility (Acts 19:21ff).

Perhaps you, too, have faced stiff, covert and overt opposition to the presentation of the gospel in your life. You walk in the sandals of Paul, a great man of God.

Even though Paul had his share of gospel opposition, I do not think that is his point here in this statement to the Romans. I say this because of what he says in verse 23:

²² For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you; ²³ but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you . . .

¹ Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huing, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 10.

What delayed Paul (which is another lexical connotation of the word in question) was his deep, abiding commitment to his gospel goal. Just when he finished his first missionary trip in 48-49 A.D. (13:1-14:28), he saw the need for a second one from 50-52 A.D. (Acts 15:36-18:22), and, then, a third and final one from 53-57 A.D. (Acts 18:23-21:16). When he had planted the gospel in each of the strategic cities in these varying geographical areas, then he did not feel hindered in coming to Rome any more so that he could ramp up his gospel goal to a new height.

As a side note, we must stop and ask ourselves a very important question: am I constantly working on realizing a gospel goal? What is that goal, exactly, as we have discussed? Is it to share Christ with everyone in your battalion? Is it to share Christ with everyone you attended West Point, or Annapolis, or the Air Force Academy with? Is it to share Christ with everyone in your dorm wing at George Mason? Really, what is your gospel goal, and is your commitment to that goal delaying you from getting to your really big gospel goal?

Let's talk more about that.

Paul's missionary journeys represented his first three gospel goals; however, these goals paled into insignificance with his big goal of taking the gospel to Spain, which was the end of the earth in his day. Let's call this goal what it is: a BHAGG, or the Big Hairy Audacious Gospel Goal.

²⁴ whenever I go to Spain—

Why Spain? Barclay gives us an interesting answer:

(2) At this time, Spain was experiencing a kind of blaze of genius. Many of the greatest figures in the Empire were Spaniards. Lucan, the epic poet, Martial, the master of the epigram, and Quintilian, the greatest teacher of oratory of his day, were all Spaniards. Above all, Seneca, the great Stoic philosopher, who was first the guardian and afterwards the prime minister of Nero, was a Spaniard. It may well be that Paul was saying to himself that, if only he could touch Spain for Christ, tremendous things might happen.²

No wonder Paul set his sights on Spain.

All of this moves us to look at ourselves and ask one pivotal question: What is my BHAGG? Yes, what is your Spain? Who are your Spaniards? Here are some ideas to get you started:

- I will learn a gospel presentation in the next month.
- I will share my faith with 100 people by the end of the year.
- I will daily pray for ten people I know need the Savior.

You get the picture, now start painting. Having a BHAGG is what maturing in Christ is all about. David Livingstone, a Scottish physician and a pioneer missionary with the London Missionary Society, had a BHAGG in the nineteenth century: take the gospel to Africa. He arrived, as a medical missionary, in Cape Town in March of 1841. Throughout the rest of his life he explored Africa as no one before him, resulting in the country being opened up for others to bring the gospel to previously unexplored areas. When asked where he wanted to go as a young man, he is

² William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 241.

reported to have replied, “Anywhere, so long as it is forward.” How Pauline. May this also be said of us as we head toward greater maturity.

The next trait of spiritual growth is short and sweet and contained in the last part of verse 24:

Earmark #6: He Enjoys Being With Other Saints (Rom. 15:24b)

Paul’s love for other saints is written all over these words:

for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—

A person who didn’t love being with people would have never said this. Paul was cut from a different cloth. True, he wanted to head to Spain via Rome, but how could he not stop along the way and say “Hi” to the saints there? Note well how the people-lover talked to his peeps, “when I have first enjoyed your company for a while.” The Greek word for enjoy means to be filled up, like a cup being filled with fluid. Filled up. What a wonderful picture of fellow believers being together.

What is it about being with other Christians which fills you up? This is an interesting question. After being with 51 fellow parishioners for two weeks in Israel, I asked a group of them at our dinner table the last night this question: What will you miss most about being in Israel? The answer was most interesting. To a person they said, “We will miss spending quality time with each other at meals.” Wow. That’s just another way of saying, “We’ll miss getting filled up with each other.”

So, how does being with Christians fill you up? Or in other words, how is it enjoyable?

- You are with people who love you unconditionally . . . just like Jesus.
- You are with people who talk about things which matter most . . . just like Jesus.
- You are with people who share the same faith beliefs in common.
- You are with people who know how to have good, clean fun.
- You are with people who aren’t interested in being surface, fake, or shallow friends.
- You are with people who will give you hope for the day.
- You are with people who won’t mind being a sounding board for things you are facing.
- You are with people who know that two is better than one (Ecc. 4:9-12).
- You are with people who will stand in storm with you and call you to lean on the power of Christ.
- You are with people who will stop and pray with you. Each day one of our group members stopped me in my tracks and prayed for my ministry for the day. Talk about getting filled up.

Show me a maturing saint and I’ll show you one who knows the rich, lasting, and meaningful value of making time for God’s people.

What about you? Are you making time for people in this body? It is a sign of great, godly maturity. I pray it flows through your life like a mighty stream.

A seventh earmark of maturity is embedded in verses 25 through 28.

Earmark #7: He Does His Part To Alleviate Body Needs (Rom. 15:25-28)

Watch how this point naturally arises from Paul's words:

²⁵ but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷ Yes, they were pleased *to do so*, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. ²⁸ Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.

During his third missionary journey, Paul collected money from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to give to the poor Jewish church in Jerusalem, the mother Church. The saints in this church suffered greatly for their faith in a culture devoted to the Law, tradition, and an outright opposition to Jesus as the Messiah. Keeping a job was tough. Losing clients occurred the moment you stepped into the baptismal waters and claimed you were a Christ-follower. Being shunned by family members who thought you hated Moses and Law came with the new faith turf. All of this, of course, resulted in an impoverished church which had made so many Gentiles spiritually wealthy.

Paul, the lover of people, had a simple plan: Collect a hefty donation from the Gentile churches for the Jewish church. It seemed only logical and fitting for, after all, these Gentiles owed the saints of this church their newfound faith which came by emissaries they had sent out over the years. So, Paul challenged the various churches to give, and give they did with great liberality and generosity. I'm sure those destitute saints never forgot the gift Paul lovingly brought them from the Gentile believers. How could you?

This is a perfect picture of a godly, growing saint. He hears about needs in the body and he steps forward to alleviate said needs by creative means if necessary. Several years ago a wealthy Christian friend of mine had a friend facing the loss electrical business because of the housing implosion in California. As things went from bad to worse, the bank moved in to foreclose on the man's beautiful custom home. "What did you do when that happened?" I asked my friend. "I did what any man in my position would do. I bought my friend's house and I gave him the deed free and clear." Wow. What a godly move.

Now, I realize that God might not have positioned you to give like this; however, He has entrusted monies to you and He will want to know how you invested them when you stand before Him (Matt. 25:14-30). Believe me, there is no better place to use those monies than in the lives of God's people who need the assistance of a brother or sister in Christ. Again, to live in this fashion is to live a life of Christian maturity. May God show you whose life you need to touch for time and eternity.

A seventh timely concept about maturity surfaces from the closing verses of this chapter.

Earmark #7: He Covets The Prayers Of Other Saints (Rom. 15:29-33)

Even though Paul had accomplished much for God, even though he was a Bible teacher extraordinaire, even though he did more in his spiritual life than most, he was humble and honest enough to ask for prayer for the road ahead. His words here are bathed in love for the saints and for the help their collective prayers could give him.

²⁹ And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. ³⁰ Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, ³¹ that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and *that* my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; ³² so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find *refreshing* rest in your company. ³³ Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

In verse thirty he asks the saints to “strive together with” him in prayer. These two words come from one word in Greek, *sunagonizomai* (συναγωνίζομαι). The preposition here, *sun*, is wedded to the word which speaks of being super committed to helping someone in a tough, trying situation. And you are right, we get our word agony from this word.

Ostensibly, this lexical nuance means Paul urged the believers not to nonchalantly walk into God’s presence with a trite, short, simple prayer for him, but one worked out on the altar of deep emotion. Put differently, Paul was not asking for a prayer to the tune of “Lord, please be with Paul,” but “Lord, Lord, you know this is a godly man taking the gospel to a godless world Lord, Lord, you know this man is hated because he stands for truth. Lord, Lord, will you hear me as I cry out in behalf of this saint who has endured so much for the cross?”

Note Paul asked for three things specifically, which tells you that maturing saints know how to present the specifics of what they need prayer for. Here was Paul’s prayer list:

- One, that he would be delivered from the devious Jews in Judea when he arrived.
- Two, that the Jerusalem church, which might have had Jewish Christians in it who were not sure about Paul’s Gentile mission, that they, of all people, would be deeply appreciative of this love gift he collected.
- Three, that he would eventually come to Rome to find joy and refreshment in seeing these saints.

Did God answer these prayers? Let us see.

Paul *was* delivered from the hostile Jews in Jerusalem, meaning they did not kill him. They did go crazy over his courageous testimony on the temple mount (Acts 22:17ff). The High Priest, Ananias, had Paul slapped across the mouth for his Christian testimony (Acts 23:2), and the Jewish leadership devised a plan to murder him (Acts 23:11ff). Roman soldiers did step in and saved him. An armed detail of 470 heavily armed soldiers escorted him to their base in Caesarea by the Mediterranean Sea (Acts 23:23). So, he *was* delivered, but not exactly how he anticipated. Imagine what would have occurred had the saints in Rome not have prayed for him.

Did the Jerusalem church accept Paul’s gift? Yes (Acts 21:17-20). So, this prayer was answered. Again, the prayers of the mostly Gentile saints in Rome served to soften the hearts of the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem. Thank God for those who prayed that Paul’s work would prove effective.

Did Paul get to travel to Rome and find refreshment from the Roman saints? Yes, and no. He *did* travel to Rome but as a prisoner of Rome. He *was* met by joyous Roman believers when he arrived (Acts 28:15). While he remained under Roman guard for two years, he continued to write letters to the churches, witness to guards (Phil. 1:13), and receive countless guests like Timothy

(Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21), Epaphroditus (Phil. 4:18), and Mark (Col. 4:10). God granted this prayer request; however, He answered it in a way which coincided with His wise, perfect will for Paul.

Ever had God answer a prayer request in a way far beyond what you anticipated? Been there. Done that. Are not His ways above our ways? Are not His thoughts beyond our thoughts? (Isa. 55:8-9). Indeed. Godly people know this and are good with this. Godly people, people who are growing up in the faith are not afraid to offer their precise prayers to God's people; however, they also know that how God will answer them will be the best thing that could ever happen, even if that answer is different than expected. If you are a maturing saint, you know what I am talking about, don't you?

Why should you pray? Because God commands it from people of faith. Because we face evil itself (Eph. 6:18ff). Because, as James says, the prayer of a righteous man does avail much (James 5:16). Because prayer is the sure fire sign you are growing up in your relationship with Jesus.

So, I have to ask you: What are your three big requests for prayer? Find someone to give them to, ask them to fervently pray with and for you, and then step back and what God work in a wondrous fashion.