

Working Together for God's Blessings

Scripture Text: Romans 15:22-33

Introduction

Last week, we read some things Paul wrote about the work God had called him to do. From that passage, I asked the question, "What is our work for God?" That question assumes there is work God has called us to do. God has recruited us to be soldiers in the Lord's army. We are to be laborers in His field. We are to be servants doing our Master's work. Paul was a servant of Jesus Christ who was proud of what Christ had done through him. Like Paul, God has called us to reach the lost for Jesus Christ. If you are a follower of Christ, God has given you marching orders to tell others what you know about Christ. Like Paul, God has called us to disciple believers so they become mature followers of Jesus Christ. God has instituted the Church to be a training center for His workers where they grow in their faith and where they work together in building up each another. Also, like Paul, God has called each of us to glorify Him in all that we do. How can we work better to accomplish what God has called us to do?

We now come to the final portion of Romans chapter fifteen, and Paul has written some additional remarks about his work, which also speak to our own work for God. Based on the passage, I titled this message "Working Together for God's Blessings". Have you received a blessing from God? Do you like to receive them? I have been to churches where it was an important thing to receive God's blessings. I think we all want to receive blessings from God. We pray that He will bless us, but perhaps a better question is this: Have you been a blessing of God to others? Has God used you, or have you allowed God to use you, in order to bless others? As mature believers in Jesus Christ, we have a duty to work together for the mission of the Church so that we bless others, after all, that is the promise God gave to Abraham thousands of years ago (Genesis 12:1-3). Let us look at this passage to see what it says about working together to bless others.

Let Us Work Together for God's Work

Have you ever wanted to do something so badly, but were prevented from doing it? Maybe it was going to a game or a concert but you could not go because of other commitments. That was true for Paul. Paul wrote in his opening remarks of this letter that he wanted to visit the church in Rome, but he had been unable to do it (Romans 1:13). The reason Paul was hindered from visiting the believers in Rome was that he was busy preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who had not heard about Christ. Paul's ambition, what he aspired to do, was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ in places where Christ had never been preached (Romans 15:20–21). Paul had the heart of a missionary and he wanted to share Christ with those who did not know Him. That work kept Paul from visiting the church in Rome. Look at the following.

Romans 15:22–24 ²² *This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.* ²³ *But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you,* ²⁴ *I hope to see you*

in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

The truth is that God does not always send us where we want to go. Remember Jonah? Paul wanted for years to go to Rome, but he had other responsibilities that prevented it. That did not mean Paul did not want to go, he just had more important things to do at that time. God gave Paul the ministry of planting new churches where none existed. That was Paul's ministry, and yet, in this passage, he mentioned that there was now no room for work in those places he was ministering. Have you ever felt like there was no more work for you to do? Maybe you desired for such a thing, or maybe you desired for something more to do, but there was nothing else to do. For Paul, it is like finishing something you have been working on for a long time. You may feel a sense of pride or a sense of accomplishment. No doubt that was somewhat like what Paul felt.

But, how could Paul say his work was complete when many people had still not heard the gospel in those areas? In a sense, Paul had completed *his work* in those regions, but there was more work to be done. Paul had laid a foundation for the Christian faith and he had planted churches in those areas. Now, others would pick up the mantle and water the seed Paul planted. Others would need to *continue* the work there, to disciple the believers to become mature Christians and to reach more people for Jesus Christ. This raises an important issue we heard last week. We are working together with each other, with other Christians throughout the world, in order to do God's work. We are working together in order to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world. No doubt, the newly planted churches in those areas were to continue Paul's work.

We must never believe our work for God is done. The work may change, the people we help may change, or the venue where we work may change, but we still have work to do until Jesus returns. Last week, I mentioned that there are many people in need around us. There are people who are hurting. There are people facing extraordinary challenges with their health or their family. God has placed this church here to help those who are in need. There are several ways that you can serve this community. We have a DivorceCare ministry. We do community outreach events. We have many people who are sick or shut in. There are other things, such as printing materials for the worship services, providing food for church events, and providing transportation for people who need it. These are things we can work together in order to continue what God has called us to do. Are you willing to work together with the church to do these things?

Let Us Work Together to Bless Others

In verse twenty-four, Paul mentioned that he was also planning a trip to Spain where he would share Jesus Christ with the folks there. Paul invited the church in Rome to come along side him to help him in that ministry effort. In this passage, Paul referred to receiving blessings through his ministry. For some, this might mean that we receive God's blessings. But really, the meaning here is that we work together to bless others. The church ought to desire and work towards being a blessing to others. In fact, it was God's promise to Abraham long ago, that his descendant, Jesus Christ, would be a

blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). By extension, Jesus' Church is to be a blessing to the world by witnessing the greatest blessing to the world. Look at the following:

Romans 15:25–27 ²⁵ *At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.* ²⁶ *For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.* ²⁷ *For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.*

Paul was planning to visit the church in Rome, but first, he was going to visit Jerusalem. There were many poor people living in Jerusalem and the Christians there had suffered some hardship. Paul was going to deliver aid to them that he had collected from some churches in Macedonia and Achaia. These were churches in Greece, about 3,000 miles from Jerusalem. That is almost the distance from Raleigh, NC to Seattle, WA. The churches in Greece were sending donations to help the saints in Jerusalem. Paul said they were “pleased” to do this. What would we say about some churches in Seattle, who did not know us, contributing to our needs? What does that say about the idea that we need to help only those in our own church or community? Surely, we need to do that, but where there are needs elsewhere and we know about those needs and God has given us the resources to meet those needs, we have an *obligation* to help others.

It was not only a privilege for the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to help those in Jerusalem, but it was their duty. Paul said the churches in that region “owed” it to the saints in Jerusalem to help them. That is a pretty strong statement! In the early church, people from a different culture were willing to help the Jews who were the source of the salvation they had received. Paul may have seen this as a debt since the Gentiles were grafted into God's olive tree (Romans 11:17). Essentially, Paul was saying that if the Gentile believers shared in the spiritual blessings of Jesus Christ through the work and faith of Jewish Christians, they ought to share their material blessings with them as well. Do we think like that? Do we think that since God has blessed us with the riches of salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ, not to mention a nice place to worship Him, with various material blessings, and with relative financial prosperity compared to the rest of the world, that we owe it to others? Do we see the things God “gives” us individually and corporately as ways to bless others, or primarily to bless ourselves?

We should remember that God entrusts His riches to the church in order to bless others. Anything we have, any money we receive, any thing at all is to be used for the work of God. If you want to know where a person's passion is or how faithful they are to the things of God, look at their bank account. As Jesus said, are we laying up treasures in heaven or on earth (Matthew 6:19-21)? We are under obligation to use God's “stuff” as His stewards to do His work. Therefore, if we share spiritual blessings with others, we owe it to God and to others to also share our material blessings, even with those not in our congregation. Thus Paul was going to deliver to the church in Jerusalem a portion of the material blessings God had given those Gentile churches. Perhaps, Paul was partly motivated by a desire to further bring the Jewish and Gentile Christians together. Much

of what Paul has written in this letter was to bring those two groups together. One other blessing, Paul mentioned the *blessed visit* he would have in Rome. Look below.

Romans 15:28–29 ²⁸ *When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.* ²⁹ *I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.*

Paul was sure that when he finally arrived in Rome to visit the church there, he would come “in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.” Paul probably did not realize at the time that this meant that he would arrive in Rome as a prisoner of the Roman government. We know from the book of Acts that this “blessing of Christ” included a hazardous journey on the sea, arriving bound in chains as a prisoner, and facing the prospect of death (Acts 24:27; 28:11–31). Paul came to Rome in chains, but he arrived with joy and full of purpose and blessing. Is that how we measure God’s blessings on us? Do we see trouble, sufferings and persecution as blessings of God? Do we believe that whatever happens to us, as long as we serve God and bless others, we will be full of God’s blessing? We should! What Paul knew was that the sufferings of this world are not worth comparing with the glory that God will reveal to us in the future (Romans 8:18). Paul could see past his temporary trials to the rich ministry opportunities of blessing others.

Let Us Work Together in Prayer and Fellowship

So often we may think our Christian duty is to simply give money to a ministry and we have done what we are supposed to do. For many of us, it may be easy to give something to help others, to help a church, or to help a missionary overseas. All we have to do is write a check or put some money in the offering plate and we can go on with our lives. Paul did not have that mindset, though. Look at the following verses.

Romans 15:30–33 ³⁰ *I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,* ³¹ *that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,* ³² *so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.* ³³ *May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

Paul’s idea of a church community was a group of people saved by God’s grace who supported each other. Paul mentioned that the church ought to strive together. This idea of striving means to struggle or fight with others. This is not fighting each other, as many churches do, but it is fighting along side each other for a common goal. *We are to work together to do the work of God.* This common struggle includes most importantly prayer. We must pray together for each other and for the work God has called us to do. Paul asked the church in Rome to pray with him about some specific concerns. He asked the church in Rome to pray he would be protected from the Jews who opposed his ministry to the Gentiles. Paul had faced much opposition to his ministry and he needed the prayer warriors in Rome to help him. Paul also asked for them to pray that the gifts from

the Gentiles would be well received when he arrived in Jerusalem. He also asked that they pray, God willing, he would be able to come visit them, as he had planned to do.

We ought to be praying for each other. We ought to be praying for the work of the church. If you are not praying for each other, for your church, and for the work God has called you to do, then you are not being faithful to God. That being said, many of us can pray for others. If you ask some to pray for you, they will be happy to do it. However, if you ask them to pay your phone bill for a month or to give you money to buy groceries, the response might be a little less enthusiastic. Our struggle with one another, our striving together, cannot consist of only prayer for one another, as important as that is. If we just pray for the needs of others, and do not respond to those needs when we have the ability to do so, our faith is dead. Do you remember what James wrote about this?

James 2:15–17 ¹⁵ *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,* ¹⁶ *and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?* ¹⁷ *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

Therefore, we must pray for others and we must care for others as God gives us the means and the opportunity. This goes well with something else Paul mentioned. We need to work together in *fellowship*. Back in verse twenty-four, Paul mentioned that he hoped to enjoy the company of the church in Rome for a while before he set off for Spain. Again in verse thirty-two, Paul mentioned that by God’s will he hoped to come to them with joy and be refreshed by their company. Fellowship is important for the health of a church. Most churches offer many opportunities for believers to have fellowship with each other — Sunday school, Sunday morning worship, Sunday lunch, mid-week Bible study, community events, retreats, and dinner at people’s homes. We ought to take advantage of these opportunities to gather together and enjoy Christian fellowship. The Church needs to work together to build fellowship with one another. We need to come together for each other, so that we can grow together in our faith and support one another in the work God has for us to do. Will you help your church do that?

Conclusion

In closing, I think the main idea of this passage is this: *Let us work together in serving, in giving, in praying and in fellowship, so that we can be a blessing of God to others.* We all want to receive the blessings of God, but do we want to be a blessing of God to other people. Are we working together for God’s blessings? Are we working to receive His blessings or are we working to be His blessing to others? As we work together, we have the promise that God is with us. Notice how Paul closed this chapter — he spoke of God in verse thirty-three of this passage as the God of *peace* being with us (Romans 15:33). Paul wrote earlier in this chapter of God being the source of *patience* and of *encouragement*. Later in the chapter he spoke of God as being the source of our *hope*, and then he prayed for the God of *peace* to be with the Roman Christians. As we work together for our common purpose, the God of hope and peace will be with us, even unto the end of the ages (Matthew 28:20). This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!