

Romans 15:17-19

PREVIOUS

NEXT

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans — 3:21-5:21	Romans — 6:1-8:39	Romans — 9:1-11:36	Romans — 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
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Romans 15:7-10

Romans 15:11-14

Romans 15:15-18

Romans 15:19-26

Romans 15:27-33

[Romans 15:17-19](#)

Being A Useful Vessel to the Lord

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

In this study we want to talk about being a useful vessel to the Lord. Paul has described that Christ does His work through him. Romans 12:1-2 comes into the picture here. It does all the way through the book. It just flows all the way through the end of the book. "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

When we live Romans 12:1-2, God is going to do a work through us. We are to be the surrendered vessel. He is to be the power in and through that vessel. It's His power. It's His presence. It's my willingness to surrender unto Him. Oh, how God used the Apostle

Paul. As a matter of fact, it's been overwhelming to me to think how God used one man. But God can do the same to any of us who are willing to surrender to Him. I want you just to think about that. I want you to think about the potential that's in us if we would just come to the place of saying, "God, use me. I don't want to live for myself. I just want to live for you. God, do through me what only you can do." We haven't seen anything yet. To the degree a congregation becomes surrendered individually will be the degree that God is able to use it to spread His message around the world.

I want you to hold your place in Romans 15 and turn back to the book of 1 Chronicles. It's interesting to me that you would never know who this guy was unless you studied the genealogy of the Old Testament. Only two verses in scripture is even given to him. But I believe it sort of helps us understand the thinking of where I want to take you in this scripture, where I believe God is leading us as we understand the potential of how God wants to use us.

First Chronicles 4:9-10 says, "And Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez saying, 'Because I bore him with pain.' Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from harm, that it may not pain me!' And God granted him what he requested." I want to look at that just for a second. I'm not going to spend a lot of time. I'm just going to be introducing what we're going to be talking about through this Old Testament man by the name of Jabez.

Little is known about Jabez. There was a city where the scribes lived that most people think was named after this man, Jabez. We have no proof of that at all. Like I said, nothing much was said about him. Sometimes when scripture is silent, it's saying volumes. Because it doesn't say much about him, that could indicate how well he was really known back in that time. The scripture did not need to describe who he was. Jabez was a man of great influence. Jabez was a man who wanted God to use him. So he prays, "God increase or enlarge my border." Now, the word for border has to do with territory that one would own. In other words, the boundaries. He's saying, "God, increase my boundaries. God, move my territory out." It's not only what you owned, but what you ruled. In other words, my sphere of influence. He's saying, "God, move me out in my sphere of influence. Enlarge my borders. Increase my coast. Move me out in what you can do in my life."

He says, "That Thy hand might be with me. That Thou would keep me from harm." The word "from harm" kind of leads us away from what the Hebrew says there. The Hebrew word that's translated "harm" is the word "evil" or "bad." So what he's saying is, "God, keep me from evil, in the sense that I don't want anything in my life to grieve or hinder what You want to do with me." And certainly if that city was named after Jabez, God did exactly that. Because those who were living in the city named after him were writing, even in those days, the scriptures. Jabez was a man who wanted God to enlarge his borders, to increase his sphere of influence.

Have you ever thought that this is what life is all about? As long as your heart is pumping and you are a born again believer, then God has something He wants to do through your life. That's what life is all about. If you're just living for a time that you can sit back and kick your feet up, you'll be out of here in no time. But God wants you to come to a place and say, "God, enlarge my borders. God, increase the influence that I can have upon this world for the Lord Jesus Christ."

We have friends in Mississippi who, when they got to retirement age, they got before the Lord and said, "God use us in our old age. Let the last years of our life be more influential even than the younger years of our life." They began to pray, and God began to work in their hearts. They began a ministry where they travel all over the Northwest working with pastors on the home mission field, guys who are suffering, guys who are struggling, guys who don't have a lot of folks to help them found their church. They go in and stay sometimes six months. They pay their own expenses and live in a motor home. I want to tell you, they are filled with joy. God is using them.

That's what it's all about. God use me. If we'll live the Romans 12:1-2 life and say, "God, I don't want my life to be for myself. I want my life to be for you," there is no telling what God will do through each of us, individually and corporately in the congregation. Come to that place and say, "God, enlarge my borders. God, increase the sphere of influence you can have through me." Of course, all the praise goes back to Him.

Well, let's go back and read Romans 15:17-19 and catch up to where we are. Paul is saying there is a time to boast. The only right we ever have to boast is for what God does through us. He says, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me."

That is as clear as anything you can find in scripture. I went back to the Greek to see if maybe the translators picked up on this and used a word that could be translated a different way. There is no other way to translate that verse. Only what Christ has done through me. That's the Christian life. That's not me living for God alone. Obviously, it is me surrendered one hundred percent. But

it's God living through me. He says I'm going to praise Him for what He does through me.

He goes on to say, "resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit." Remember, in verse 19 the key is not signs and wonders. God can do that any time He wants to. The key here is in the power of the Spirit.

I want to help you to understand something so you'll follow my thinking as we work through these verses. The Holy Spirit of God not only does something through us, but at the same time, He does something in us. What we're going to see in this study could be preached the wrong way. I could preach it in such a way that every one of us would leave under condemnation because we're not living like the Apostle Paul. We do not want to bring any praise or attention to Paul. We want to bring all of our attention and praise to Christ who lives in Paul and the Holy Spirit of God who is enabling him to be the things that we'll talk about in his life.

Before we even begin that, look in Philippians 2:13 to make sure you're hearing me. It is so imperative that we understand. Once we get it down, then when we see a man living a certain way, we will not praise that man. We will praise God who works in that man. It says, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Now what Paul is telling us here is that it's even God who gives us the desires in our hearts. Before He empowers what we do, He even starts with the desires. He gives us the desire to do what we do. It is not our flesh.

A few weeks ago, Dr. John Ankerberg spoke to us at our Awana presentation. He spoke out of Philippians 2. The context of chapter 2 is in the area of relationships, serving others. He brought out this particular verse, and it has not left my mind since I heard him speak. He said, "Now how do we know the difference when God is willing in us, when God is putting a desire in us and when our flesh is putting that desire?" He drew the analogy of a person who's sitting in a classroom daydreaming. As you're daydreaming, what are your daydreams about? When you daydream, you're always thinking about things of the flesh.

The illustration he gave was at a ball game. He said he was daydreaming one day and was thinking, "There were seven seconds left on the clock, time out. We had the ball. We were one point down. We went over to the coach and the coach asked who wanted the ball. I said, 'I want the ball, coach. Give me the ball.' The team said, 'That's right! Give it to Ankerberg.' So we went back out onto the floor and got the ball to me. I took it to the corner and three guys came over to stop me. I turned and wheeled and jumped. Just before the clock went off, I shot. The clock went off as the ball was in the air and suddenly the ball fell through the net. We won the game."

Now, that's when the flesh is being pampered and being lifted up. That's when the flesh is giving you that desire. But when the Holy Spirit of God is in you to will and to work, the Holy Spirit is the one telling you, "Don't do this for yourself. Do this for that person." It'll never be your flesh sitting in an auditorium that says, "Take this and give it to the Lord." It'll be your flesh that says, "Don't give it because if you do, you won't be able to get something else that you want." You can always discern the difference when the Lord is willing in you and when the flesh is willing in you.

The context of Philippians 2 is relationships, and it'll never be the flesh that'll tell you to bow down and serve another person. It'll never be the flesh to tell you to go on a mission trip. It won't be the flesh to tell you to do this. It's going to be the Holy Spirit of God who says, "Deny yourself. Die to yourself. Do only what I want you to do."

I want you to see the Apostle Paul is a man who's been affected by the inner working of the Holy Spirit of God. Not only is God doing something through him, God's doing something in him. If you want to be a useful vessel to the Lord, you have to learn some of these things. I think we can glean them from the Apostle Paul. We're not praising him. We're praising what God's doing in and through his life.

First of all, Paul had a steadfastness to endure in the assignment that God had given him. We must have this. If God's going to do a work through us, we're going to have to see it all the way through. Many of us are great starters but not great finishers. God's interested in finishing, not just starting. Paul had them both. But it's the Holy Spirit working in him who we must give praise to.

Look at verse 19 of Romans 15: "so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." Now what Paul is doing is showing the coast that had been enlarged. He's showing the territory that had been moved out. He's showing the sphere of his influence that God had taken all the way to the area of Europe. Now if you want to get a prospective on that, from Jerusalem to Illyricum is fourteen hundred miles. Illyricum is located in what we now call Bosnia. Paul says, "From Jerusalem to Bosnia I have taken the message of Jesus Christ. Fourteen hundred miles." You say, "Well, that's not much." It's not? They didn't have cars. They did have boats to ride like we do. Some of them had sails. They didn't have planes. They didn't have telephones. They didn't have any of these other things. Fourteen hundred miles the Apostle Paul took the gospel of the Lord Jesus

Christ.

I want to tell you something now, folks. You start thinking about that. Here's one man. As a matter of fact, a persecutor of Christians, and God met him on the Damascus Road, turned him around, reassigned him, and the Holy Spirit of God now lived in him. The Holy Spirit working in him caused him to be so steadfast God could use him from Jerusalem all the way to Bosnia, fourteen hundred miles, to take the message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing stopped him. He said, "I have fully preached from Jerusalem and around about as far as Illyricum. I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ."

That term, "fully preached," could be translated two different ways. One is, "I have preached the full counsel of the gospel of Jesus Christ." That's certainly true. As a matter of fact, when he wrote the Colossian church in Colossians 1:25, he says, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the work of God." That's what he meant. He didn't leave anything out. He fully preached the gospel to the church at Colossae. But in the context here, I think there's another meaning that really fits it better. He is saying, "I didn't miss any geographical area from Jerusalem to Illyricum. I did not miss a single spot. I covered the territory with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." Nothing stopped him.

Now folks, listen to me. Don't think he didn't have trouble in doing that. He said he was preaching to an unreached people, people who had never named the name of Christ. He had problems in front of him that would have made most of us quit the first week. But he stayed with it all the way through to the finish. Nothing stopped him. God was able to use him and do through him what He has assigned to him to do. So, therefore, we begin to see the steadfastness that Paul had to see the work all the way through.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 11:23-27. I just want to show you some of the things that he encountered along the way. Most of these things would have whipped us, but when we're willing to live Romans 12:1-2, the Spirit of God produces a steadfastness in us. We're willing to stick to it. We're willing to stay to the finish. So often we want to bail out; so often we want to quit; but Paul did not. We don't give praise to Paul. We give that praise to God. In 2 Corinthians 11:23 he says, as he is attacked again for his being an apostle, "Are they servants of Christ? [referring to the people who are accusing him] (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."

Now, if you want to think about what he was doing here and you want to think about it as being easy, you miss the whole point. The Apostle Paul says, "Hey, this has not been an easy task." But he was able to stay all the way through. In other words, what God started, the Apostle Paul, by his surrender to the Holy Spirit, was given the ability to allow God to finish in his life.

See, God's not just working through us, He's working in us. He gives us the will. He gives us the desire. Once we're willing to surrender to that, in the energy of the Holy Spirit of God, then God's able to complete His task in our life.

No wonder Paul could write 2 Timothy 4:6-7. This is at the end of his life. This is after the assignment has been carried out. Look what he was able to write: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." Oh, if we could say that the day that we draw our dying breath. We could say, "I've fought the good fight. I've finished the course. I've kept the faith."

Folks, we can say that if we learn to present our bodies to Him. If we learn to live Romans 12:1-2, the Holy Spirit of God will give us the enduring power to bear up under and go all the way to the finish, and then we can give all the glory back unto God. He says in verse 8, "in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

What I'm trying to show you is that the Apostle Paul's influence extended from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum. "Fourteen hundred miles," the man said, "I fully preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. I didn't miss an area." You would say, "Oh, if I could be like Paul." No, you would say, "Praise You, God, for what You did in a man who was named Paul. It had to have been Your Spirit who gave him that steadfastness and the ability to see it all the way to the finish."

One of the things I'm understanding is God the Holy Spirit gives you the will and desire, the staying power, the steadfastness to weather the storms and to stay in something until He has accomplished what He wants to do through your life. We see that in Paul.

We can also take encouragement from that. The same Holy Spirit lives in us. If we'll live Romans 12:1-2, then He'll take care of the rest of it. He'll give us that steadfastness.

As a matter of fact, to clarify it a little bit more, look in Colossians 1:9-10. This is true in everybody's life. Let's don't put Paul up on a pedestal and say, "Praise Paul!" No. We praise God. He can work in our life just like He worked in Paul's life. In Colossians 1:9-10 Paul is praying for the Colossian church. He says in his prayer, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." In other words, God will give you a revealed understanding and knowledge of His will. That's what he prayed for. Verse 10 continues, "so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." That's our responsibility. It never changes. Then watch—"to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

While I'm seeking to live in the revealed knowledge of God's will, while I'm seeking to walk in a manner worthy Him, He takes over and I begin to bear fruit in every good work. I begin to increase in the knowledge of God. I get to know God like I've never known Him before. I'm not initiating this action; God is doing it as I'm seeking to live the surrendered life. It says in verse 11, "strengthened with all power"—the word "power," *dunamis*, means ability that I didn't have before—"according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience."

Now what is that? Steadfastness is the word *hupomeno*, which means the ability to bear up under something, whatever comes my way. You can go back to Corinthians and read Paul's letter and talk about all the difficulties he went through and you can see the Holy Spirit of God working in him, giving that steadfastness, giving him the ability to bear up under whatever came his way. The word "patience," *makrothumia*, means to deal with people. All the people who came against him, even Alexander the coppersmith that he mentions in one of his letters, and many of the others that gave him all kinds of problems, Paul was given by the Holy Spirit steadfastness and patience. He was able to bear up under. He was able to put up with the people who dealt with him until the assignment God had given him was carried out.

We want to look at Paul and see that he had a steadfastness. God started him in Jerusalem and took him all the way to the continent of Europe there in the area of Bosnia. For fourteen hundred miles the sphere of influence was spread out by the Apostle Paul. God was working in him as He was working through him.

Secondly, Paul had a security in God's purpose for his life. Now, when you begin to discern this is what God wants for me, there's a tremendous security in that. All of a sudden everything else doesn't matter. You begin to focus on what it is now you discern God has put before you, what your assignment is in this life. It's a beautiful thing. Look in verse 20 of Romans 15, "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation; but as it is written, 'They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.'"

As far as we know from the New Testament, the Apostle Paul ministered in more unevangelized areas than anybody else of his day. His calling, which only God could take the credit for, was not to build upon another man's foundation. Now this was unique to him. Paul had the burden and the desire. God put in him to go to places that had never ever heard the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word "aspired" comes from two Greek words. One is *philos*, which means to love or to cherish something. The other word is *time*, which means to honor. The idea of the word came to mean to aspire to something, to make something an ambition.

Paul says in verse 21, "but as it is written, 'They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have heard shall understand.'" God very clearly told Paul, I want you to go to the unreached people of this world." When he was in Asia Minor on one trip he tried his best to go up into the northern part of the country, but God wouldn't let him. The scripture even gives the idea he beat himself against the door trying to get in. Then he goes down to the southern part and God squeezed him into a place called Troas. In Troas he saw a vision of a man saying, "Come over and help." He went on over into Macedonia. You could look at the life of Paul and the design that God had for him, and you can just see God's sovereign hand on him, from start to finish. The Apostle Paul was perfectly content, perfectly secure in what it was that God had called him to do and what God had called him to be.

One of the things I'm discovering as I deal with people all over the country is that a lot of people are discontent because they have not yet discovered what role it is that God wants them to play in this big picture of His will while they're living on this earth. They still don't know. They come in and out of it. And the reason they don't have the contentment and that security is because their walk with Him is so fragile. It's like one day they're surrendered. The next day they're not. There's no consistency in their life. But once you get before God, who does the willing in you, is going to start putting the direction in front of you. Once you discern the purpose that God has, there's tremendous security in that.

There are some people who would take the life of Paul and build a denomination and say that everybody ought to be out reaching

the unreached. You have to be very careful about that, very careful. God assigned Paul that ministry. That doesn't mean He assigned everybody else the same ministry. Remember the man by the name of Apollos? Look over in 1 Corinthians 3:6. Paul was called to go to a place that he would not build on another man's foundation. He was called to go to a place that had never named the name of Jesus. But that's not true with Apollos. 1 Corinthians 3:6 says, "I planted, "Apollos watered." In other words, here's a man who came along and built upon the foundation of what somebody else had done. But God was causing the growth.

You see, what you've got to realize is, we don't have to start trying to be like Paul. What we need to do is imitate his faith. That's what he tells us in one of his epistles. Just imitate his faith. Just get before the Lord and live the Romans 12:1-2 lifestyle, and God will put you where He wants to put you. You won't be doing what Paul did. You won't be doing what Apollos did. You'll have a piece of the puzzle of what God is doing in our world today. God wants to use each and every one of us.

Back in chapter 12 of Romans, Paul says He gives us all gifts and with those gifts come assignments and ministries. Somebody may have a small piece. Somebody else may have a large piece. It doesn't matter. Security and contentment come when you begin to discern this is what God wants me to do. It's very clear in Paul's life that he was so focused on what God had put before him that nothing would stop him and that he could live in light of that purpose God had for him.

Let me put it back together for you. Don't lose the context. Chapter 12:1-2, you live that lifestyle. Chapter 12:9 all the way through chapter 15 is the witness you begin to have to others. Now, when you get down to verses 19, 20 and 21, when it talks about the specifics of Paul, you can push that aside, because the specifics for you will be different. You can write your own in there because God will take you and use you in ways you cannot imagine if you're just willing to allow Him to do that.

This encourages my heart. I want the rest of my life counts for the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter what age you are. When you come to that place of surrender, look out because you never know what God's going to do through your life. That's going to give you contentment. That's going to give you security. God has given me my assignment. I know what I'm called to do and I'm content with that. There's tremendous security in that, to know this is your assignment. Now, trust the Holy Spirit to give you that steadfastness to bear with it all the way to the finish and trust the Holy Spirit to give you that security in it to where you never try to step outside of your gift or you calling. You continue to be what God wants you to be.

If we took a pop test I wonder how many of us could say, "I know what it is God has gifted me for and called me to in my life. I don't know the extent of it, but I know the piece of the puzzle that I have. And I'm content with it. I'm just going to live Romans 12:1-2 in it until the Lord comes back."

Paul knew exactly what God had called him to do. As a matter of fact, it made him make all kinds of other decisions in order for God to complete that work in him. Fourteen hundred miles his influence had spread because he was willing to be the vessel that God wanted to use.

Well, the point is when you live the Romans 12:1-2 life, God will give you a steadfastness to do that which He commands and He'll give you a security in the purpose He designs for your life. A contentment and a purpose that'll take you all the way 'til Jesus comes back.

Finally, Paul had a sensitivity to God's timing in his life. Look here in Romans 15:22-25. "For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you; 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 whenever I go to Spain—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—but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints."

Paul said, "For many, many years I have been wanting to come to Rome. But because of the calling that God's put on me, because of the understanding of that calling He's given to me, I've had to make choices that cut away what my flesh wanted to do. I wanted to come to you, but I couldn't because I was being about the thing that God had put before me. But I know I am going to come one day."

He had a sensitivity to the timing of the Lord. If I could look back over the years of my life and think about the times I have missed the timing of the Lord, I could write a book. The times that I have moved ahead of God, I have chosen because of my flesh. Now, the good thing is we have a Master Weaver up here and He even takes our mistakes and will weave them back in as we are willing to surrender to Him. But oh the times that I've been insensitive to the timing of the Lord.

Paul knew that there would be a time that he would go to Rome. But the time had not yet come. He said, "I long to be there. It's not just a passing whim. I've longed to come to you but I couldn't because I'm about the things God has put before me. I'm being

steadfast in the purpose and the calling that God has put upon my life. I have had for many years, a longing to come to you."

You know, it's amazing to me. He says, "For this reason I've often been hindered from coming to you; 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 whenever I go to Spain." He said, "I'm coming, but I'm going to go to Jerusalem first."

I wonder if Paul even suspected how he was going to get there? You know how he got there don't you? He got to Jerusalem bringing the offering of the Gentile churches for the famine there among the Jews. He came into the council of the elders at the church of Jerusalem and he found out that he wasn't a popular guy in Jerusalem. The Jews didn't like him. They said that he was preaching against the tabernacle, preaching against the temple, and all these things. They told him to go down to the temple and renew a vow that he had. He went down to the temple. When he got down there, some Jews from over in Asia Minor who didn't not like Paul and the message of grace, drummed up a charge against him that caused a riot in the city. They said he took a Greek guy by the name of Trophimus behind the wall of partition, which would have demanded death. People went ballistic and there was no truth behind it. It was a rumor. The Romans didn't know what to do, so they arrested the guy. It got so hot and hostile, they had to escort him out of time. Two hundred soldiers took him down to Caesarea.

In Caesarea, he was stuck in a jail and forgotten for two years. Then they took him to Rome so he could appear before the Emperor there. He came to Rome in chains. I wonder if he ever dreamed he'd go that way. He says in chapter 1, "When I get there, I want to encourage some of you in the faith and cause you to be more steadfast and to be more concreted in the message of grace." But you know what he ended up doing? He ended up being in prison. God had such a beautiful design here. The timing of God is perfect. Paul got there and the message didn't just go to the Roman believers. The message went to the very household of Caesar. As a matter of fact, the fourth chapter of Philippians says, "I send you greetings,"—and listen to this— "and the brethren of Caesar's household send you greetings."

He thought he was going to go one way. He longed to go for years. But he kept on the thing that God had put before him but now that the work was finished there, he went to Jerusalem. The timing was perfect. It was at a time God could take the gospel and put it right in Caesar's face and the members of Caesar's household could come to know Christ.

Being sensitive to the timing of the Lord. You think Paul was that sensitive? No. It was the Holy Spirit of God in Paul to know when it was he was to go to Rome. That's the key. As a matter of fact, to illustrate that, go over to John 11 and let me show you something. I love this chapter. I want you to think about this. It's the Spirit of God that makes you sensitive to the timing of the Lord. "Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. And it was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. The sisters therefore sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.'"

Now, Mary's upset but Martha is really volatile. She's had it. She's mad. Do you know why she's mad? Because Jesus went over to the other side of Jordan. He's a day's journey away and the one whom He loved is sick. Now, what's He doing being over there when we need Him here?!

So, they write Him a little note, "Hey! Him whom You love is sick." In between the lines it reads, "Get yourself over here. We need You." But Jesus, when He heard it, wrote a note back: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it." Now, how would you like to be them when they got this note? Ha! When they got this note, Lazarus was already dead and in the tomb. Jesus said, "This sickness is not going to end unto death." Oh! I can see Martha now. "Thanks a lot! Boy, a lot of help you are!" How do I know that? Because when He gets over there, what's the first thing she says? "Where have you been? You can't do anything now. He's dead. If You had been here, he wouldn't have died." Mary said the same thing. She was a little sweeter about it.

I'm glad verse 5 comes before verse 6. I want to tell you something, the Apostle Paul had to learn this and so do we. Verse 5 says, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. He was loving Paul when Paul longed in his heart to go to Rome. God was saying, "Not yet, son. I've got a better plan. Just keep on doing what you're doing. It's tough. I know it's tough. It'll be tougher when you get to Rome. I don't want to tell you that right now. But just keep right on doing what you're doing. I know the timing. Trust Me. I'll make you sensitive to when the time is right."

Look in verse 6. "When therefore He heard that he was sick," He hurried over there because He knew how mad Martha was. Is that what it says? Not in my Bible—"He stayed then two days longer in the place where He was." Listen, what he was doing here in John 11. You know and I know, if you've studied any of the history of that time that after three days they believed there was no hope

for a spirit ever to return to a body. For three days they would have all kinds of prayer sessions trying to pray the spirit back into the body. It was superstition. But they knew on the fourth day it was too late. Jesus knew that. Jesus also knew, one of the key phrases in the gospel of John is, "The hour is not yet come for the Son of Man to be glorified." He knew that. In chapter 12, right after this happens, it says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." What was it that was going to cause that hour to come? The raising of Lazarus from the dead. That's what pulled the trigger on the plot to put Him on the cross. Jesus knew that. But the disciples didn't.

The disciples had their little agenda. The disciples said, "We're not going over there with you." And God said, "Hey, you are going with Me and you're going so maybe now you'll believe." They get over to where Lazarus was and they come to the tomb. Jesus tells them to roll back the tombstone, but Martha, bless her heart, she just can't keep her mouth shut. She says, "Lord, if you do that, he's going to stink. He's been in there four days." I just can see Jesus now going, "Martha would you cool it? Roll the stone back." Then he says, "Lazarus, come forth!" And Lazarus came walking out.

Imagine he's in Heaven and they're giving testimonies and all of a sudden he hears this voice that says, "Lazarus." "Is that you Jesus?" "Lazarus!" "Excuse me guys, I've got to go." He goes back and comes out. It said he was wrapped, his hands and his mouth and all. Jesus said, "Loose him and set him free." That's when the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin came together and said, "The whole world is following them." That's what did it. They said, "We've got to get rid of this man." Jesus knew exactly what He was doing all the time. So God's delays aren't denials. God's timing is important.

Paul went to Rome when God wanted him to go to Rome. For years he longed to go. But because of what he had been called to do, because of His purpose in his life and his sensitivity to that purpose that God the Spirit had given to him, he didn't go. He did the things that God put before him. Now, it's like God is saying, "The timing is getting right." Paul writes back to Rome and says, "I'm coming but I'm going by Jerusalem first." How prophetic. Again, he ends up there in chains but at a perfect time to get the gospel right into the Emperor's headquarters and even to those who were in power of that day.

One thing we've got to learn, folks, if we're going to walk with God, the Holy Spirit will give us a steadfastness to see it all the way to the end. But not only that; once we discern what it is God's called us to, what we're gifted for, and we're willing to commit everything to it, we find our security in it. Don't try to walk over in somebody else's. Don't be covetous of somebody, but just be who God wants you to be. God also gives us a sensitivity to His timing in our walk. We become divinely sensitive. It's not us. The praise goes to what God does in and through us. God gives us that when we're willing to put aside the desires of our flesh in order to be about the things that God has for use.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if everybody just got down on their face before God and said, "God, the only reason we're existing on this earth is to bring glory unto you. And Lord, we want all of our days to be vessels that you might increase our coast, that you might enlarge our boundaries, that you might take the influence of the gospel in us and spread it as far as you want to take it. That's all we want our life to count for until Jesus comes back."

What does God want to do through you? How far does He want to take the influence of the gospel in your life? All you need to understand is Romans 12:1-2. "God, I can't. You never said I could. You can. You always said you would." Here I am a vessel. You do through me whatever you want to do through me. Hang on! Strap the seat belt and hang on because you won't believe. You won't even know until you get to Heaven what God will do through a person who is truly surrendered.

If you'll stay willing and yielded, look out! God will blow the doors off the influence He'll have through you in other people's lives. I learned a lot from Paul. Hopefully you've gotten something from this. God the Holy Spirit is what gives you a steadfastness to finish. God the Holy Spirit gives you a security in what God has put before you. And it's God the Holy Spirit who gives you that sensitivity to the timing of the Lord as you walk with Him. There's a time, but God knows it. And you can be sensitive to it.