

Romans 1:11-13

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These Gentile believers have faith that is being talked about throughout the world, but Paul still hopes to go to them so that he may be encouraged by them while also strengthening their faith, helping to produce even greater fruits of faithfulness.

Paul says *For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established* (vs 11). Paul's prayer is to *see* these believers he has not met in person and *impart* a *spiritual gift* to them in order that they might be *established* in the faith (v 11). Although these Gentile believers are holy ("set apart") and their faith is so strong that it is "being proclaimed throughout the whole world" (v 8), Paul still wants to establish them.

The Greek word "*starezo*" rendered here by many translations as *established*, can also be translated "strengthen." The reality is that we, as frail humans, no matter how strong we grow in faith, will always need more strengthening on this side of glory. In fact, Paul acknowledges in the very next verse that he too needs to be *encouraged together with you while among you*, and if he comes to visit the Roman believers, he expects to be built up *each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine* as well (v 12).

Paul prays to God that he might be able to come to Rome in order to strengthen the believers there by applying the gifts the Spirit of God bestowed upon him, and at the same time he is desirous of being himself strengthened by the encouragement of the faith of these devout Roman believers.

Faith is, by definition, an intangible thing. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith this way: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

How can we have assurance for something we hope for? If we hope for it, then we don't currently possess it. But faith is that which considers it possessed; we believe we have the substance of what is hoped for as though we actually possessed it. Likewise, how can we have conviction regarding something we cannot see? Again, faith provides the "evidence" that what we cannot see is as real as if we could see it.

The Greek word "*pistis*," translated as *faith*, and the verb form "*pisteuo*," translated as *believe*, occur in Paul's letter to the Romans 40 times and 21 times, respectively. The theme of Romans is that the way to live a just life before men is to live by faith in God. Here we see that faith is something we do together. My faith builds yours and yours builds mine.

Paul says *I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you*. Paul desired that the Romans know he wanted to come to them, but had not been able to. They should not interpret his lack of presence as apathy toward them. Paul wants it to be known that *often he had planned to come to the Roman believers, but had been prevented so far*.

He longs for this so that he *may obtain some fruit among them also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles* (v 13). Not only does Paul have affection for the Roman believers, he also has respect for them. He would like to be ministered to by them, even as he ministers.

When Paul (finally) visits Rome for the first time, he also desires to have *fruit among the Roman believers, even as among the rest of the Gentiles* (vs 13). By the phrase *the rest of the Gentiles* we gather that Paul's Roman audience is primarily Gentile. We know there are a few Jews; Priscilla and Aquila led a church in their home, and they are Jewish (Acts 18:2; Romans 16:3-5). This letter is addressed to a Gentile audience, but will feature a rhetorical battle between Paul and a group of competing Jewish "authorities."

Paul desires to see the same fruit among these Roman believers as in the other Gentile churches he has established (in places like Corinth and Ephesus). What does Paul mean by *fruit*? The Greek word here is "*karpos*" and it is used in some form six times in Romans. In each case, it means the "outworking of what is believed."

In Romans 6:21, Paul asks the stout Roman believers, "What benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?" In other words, what fruit did they gain from their former pagan lives, living as slaves to sin? Paul answers that the "outcome of those things is death." In Romans 15:28, Paul says he plans to seal or finalize a "fruit" of the living faith of the believers in Greece by delivering a financial offering to support the Jewish believers suffering persecution in Israel at that time.

So, consistent with this entire epistle, what Paul longs to do is to participate directly in assisting the Roman believers to live their faith actively and truly in a manner that pleases God, thereby producing the *fruit* of a just life.

Biblical Text

11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.