



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## **Gospel Regret**

March 3, 2019

Romans 1:13-15

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*<sup>13</sup> I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup> I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup> So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

*(Pastor prays)*

Maybe you have heard it said that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. I think the Apostle Paul would disagree because in this passage you can feel the Gospel frustration of Paul's good intentions of wanting so badly to visit the church in Rome and yet not ever getting the chance to.

We are through the intro and now into the body of Paul's letter and it's before you get to the famous passage about the Gospel in verses 16 - 17, this is giving us a picture into his heart and grace-given desires.

I think there is a lesson here for all of us. Many of us live our lives with a certain level of frustration and discontent because there never seems to be enough time or money to actually do the things we want to do. So soon we live with a level of frustration or even regret at trips not taken or love not expressed or affection not received. And this morning I want to use this passage to baptize regret or better still learn from Paul how to direct our energies and affection toward intentions that matter and desires that will last. Desires that are centered on the Gospel of Jesus and relying on grace.

### **Grace is the Guarantee that Regrets Don't Last**

Let me show you what I mean.

## Grace Teaches Us to Make a Plan and Then Trust Providence

Notice how Paul starts out in verse 13. See the phrase, “I do not want you to be unaware brothers.” That's a phrase several times in his writings when he's getting ready to say something really important. He wanted them to know that he hadn't neglected them on purpose. In fact, you see it as he finishes the thought: “I do not want you to be unaware brothers. I have often intended to come to you.” Why did he want to come? He told us back in verses 11-12, to strengthen them and to be encouraged. So his desire and plans were Christ-centered and God-honoring. His desire was centered on others and driven by the Gospel. In other words, his intentions by anybody's standards are right and healthy and yet, notice the rest of the phrase (I put parentheses in my Bible): I do not want you to be unaware brothers. I have often intended to come to you but have been prevented.

And my question is why? Why, when his motivation is right and good and God-honoring? Why, when his obvious desire is to see people come to Christ and see the church strengthened? Why wouldn't God let him go? Ever ask that question when you want to do something good and right and God-honoring and it doesn't work out? You have some kind of ministry or Gospel presentation. I mean, my goodness, in verse 13 he even says, I was hoping to reap a harvest among you as well as among the rest of the gentiles.

Harvest. An evangelistic outreach where people would come to Christ. Jesus said in John 4:38, “Lift up your eyes, the fields are white for harvest.” Well, Paul lifted up his eyes and sees that Rome needs the Gospel and yet he can't get there. There is some discussion as to who is doing the preventing. The Living Bible says, “God did not let me”. While when he was trying to get to Thessalonica in I Thessalonians 2: 18, he says, “we wanted to come to you. I Paul, again and again but Satan hindered us. So in that passage Satan was preventing.

That's where the idea and the doctrine of Providence come in, as we will learn later in Romans, and where we learned from Joseph in Genesis, what Satan means for evil, God will use for good.

Satan is a mad dog on a short chain in the hands of a sovereign and good God. God sometimes frustrates our plans to humble us or discipline us or sanctify us. He sends rain on a Sunday to remind the preacher who is in charge. He does things to show us that His ways are above our way. Sometimes He walks us through frustration to remind us and teach us that it doesn't all

depend on us. All of the regrets and frustrations are just a reminder of grace; of God's gift to us in Jesus, the life death and resurrection. Grace teaches us to make a plan and then to trust Providence.

### **Grace Teaches Us to Love All People**

It's right there in verse 14. Let's read the whole verse and then break it down into two parts. <sup>14</sup> *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.* Those words, "under obligation," mean in debt not only to God but, as you see in the last half of the verse, to all people. "I am under obligation to God, Greeks, barbarians, the wise and the foolish - all people." It's the same sentiment he would express in I Corinthians 9: 16 when he would say woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.

Obligation really is obedience and it doesn't need to be a joyless commitment to an unpleasant task. It's the basic Christian impulse (that) if you walk by a house that is on fire and you hear screaming, you do what you can to save them. If you are at a swimming pool and you see a child drowning, you jump in to save. And Paul says "That's what I feel about people!"

Is that how you feel about people? That they are really going to Hell? Then you need to open your mouth. Notice who feels obligated to; the Greeks (the cultured people) and the barbarian, the wise and the foolish.

You get the point of what he is saying. This is probably a standard phrase meaning all races and all classes in the Gentile world. Tom Shriner says, "Any feelings of cultural or intellectual superiority are crucified by the Gospel. We know that all people will not believe, but we are obligated to *all* people. That's why Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 18, <sup>18</sup> *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. And then Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* The Gospel is the great equalizer. Every person is equally lost without it and equally saved by it. And when Paul preached the Gospel, he was unconcerned with status. He would preach the Gospel to a runaway slave like Onesimus and he would preach the Gospel to a monarch like Agrippa.

And as Christian people, our impulse for people and obedience to God is to find a way to have conversations. God is the Holy creator of man. Man is a sinner but Christ died to save us.

Believe and be saved. This has to be our identity and impulse. Grace teaches us to make a plan and trust providence. Grace teaches us to love all people.

### **Grace Teaches Us to Not Play it Safe**

Now let's read verse 15 as a whole and then break it up. <sup>15</sup>*So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.* What a great attitude. I am eager to play my part in sharing the Gospel of Jesus with the lost people I know. I've been transformed by grace. I count it a privilege to get to talk about the saving work of Christ on the cross. The Bible says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news." I am eager.

Notice the audience that Paul is preaching to: I am eager to preach to you also in Rome. J. B. Phillips said that when Paul preached the Gospel in Jerusalem, the religious center of the world, he was mobbed. When he preached the Gospel in Athens, the intellectual center of the world, he was mocked. And when he preached the Gospel in Rome, he was martyred. But he was ready for that. And I'm saying to you, don't play it safe. This is all we've got, give it to the Gospel.

I think there is something else here as well. Verse 15 says he is eager to "preach the Gospel to you who are in Rome." He's already said that he is talking to believers. So often we think the Gospel is for unbelievers, and once you have it, you move on to other things. But the Gospel is for believers. It makes us hate our sin more and love grace more and trust God more. The Gospel reminds us that God loves us, God forgives us and God restores us. The Gospel absorbs the pain and heals the hurt and sustains the joy. The Gospel can never be outgrown, so we press the Gospel into every open wound and every dark crevice saying, "Jesus is better than that." He's better than pornography. Jesus is better than temptation and alcohol. Jesus is better than drugs. He is better than travel ball and a lake house. He's better than success. Jesus is better than bitterness and racism.

We never outgrow the Gospel. We need to find a means of communication. Paul is eager to preach the Gospel. We have to use words. The ministry and loving people, meeting people's needs and caring, all sorts of mercy, they are all done so we can share that God, the holy creator, loves man. But sin has separated man from God and he is going to Hell. Christ came to earth and lived the perfect life. He was crucified, died and was resurrected to pay our debt.

Our judgment is taken away. The Gospel is God's grace and grace is the guarantee that regrets won't last. Come to Christ today, repent and believe, and leave your regrets at the cross.

*(Pastor explains The Lord's Supper and prays)*