

The Minister of Jesus Christ

by Ray C. Stedman

You may not have realized it, but we finished the book of Romans last week as far as doctrine is concerned. From the 14th verse of Chapter 15 to the end of the book, we are now in matters that are a personal postscript that the apostle added to this letter. He wrote this letter to Rome, probably from the city of Corinth, and said all that was on his heart – and what a tremendous and full message this was! Then, as he came to the close of the letter, he added certain personal words. It is this section that we enter into now. It is almost as though we have been listening to Paul teaching these Romans, and class is dismissed, and we get a chance to meet the teacher a bit in these last sections.

In this autobiographical section, Paul speaks of four aspects of his ministry and reveals here the heartbeat of a true minister of Jesus Christ.

Since every believer in Christ is in the ministry, in the sense that the ministry of the gospel is committed to them (and not to some special class called “the clergy” who wear their collars backwards and don long robes), the words that we read here of Paul as a minister apply to each one of us. Therefore, this is a very relevant passage for us.

The first ministry that Paul speaks of is what we might call **the ministry of reminding**. That is a blessed ministry, the ministry of reminding other Christians:

I myself am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. {Rom 15:14-16 RSV}

In a sense, everyone who reads the letter to the Romans is taking a self-examination of his own spiritual effectiveness. I don't think a Sunday goes by but that someone says to me after a message, “You know, you were talking just to me this morning. In fact, I noticed that you kept looking right at me all the time you were talking.” I must say that I have no awareness of picking out individuals at all as I am teaching through this book, but this is the phenomena which often occurs when the Spirit of God is taking the truth and bring it right home to the heart. You can't listen to the book of Romans honestly and openly without having this sense of being under examination yourself. I am sure that these first recipients of this letter had that feeling as the letter was read in the gathering in Rome.

Now, as we come to the close of the letter, Paul gives them their grade. And, although he has been saying things that sound rather penetrating and that get right underneath their skin, he says to them, “I myself am satisfied with you.” That is a wonderful grade to have from such a man as this!

He said, “I am satisfied.” That is, “I have never been there to Rome, but from all that I have heard, I believe that you are in good shape spiritually.” There are three things that convinced him of this:

- First of all, they were full of all goodness, that is, their hearts were right. Paul could sense that their motives were true – that the Spirit of love and truth and goodness was at work among them – otherwise he couldn't say something like this. This is an admission and recognition on his part that their hearts were right and he acknowledged that.

- Second, they were “filled with all knowledge,” that is, their heads were right as well. This doesn’t mean that they knew all things, that there was nothing that they needed to be instructed in, but, rather, that they acted intelligently – they acted from knowledge. They weren’t, as he wrote to one of the other churches, “tossed about by every wind of doctrine” that came along {cf, Eph 4:14}, but they acted out of an intelligent comprehension of what God wanted them to know. They acted purposefully. He commends them for that. They were not like many Christians, even today, who seem to spend their whole Christian life just trying to muddle along and do the best they can, hoping that it will all turn out all right in the end. No, these Romans didn’t do that. They knew something, and they acted from that knowledge. They didn’t act apart from it. Paul recognizes that, so their heads were right as well.
- The third mark was that they were “able to instruct one another.” That is, they were beginning to show signs of real maturity. This is such a wonderful mark of growing up in Christ, of beginning to take on full stature as a believer, when you are able to help someone else with what you have learned – “able to instruct one another.” Remember, he wrote to the Hebrews, “You have need that some teach you again what be the first principles of the doctrine of Christ; for when you ought to have been teachers, you were in need of being taught, and as such you were as babes and you were uninstructed in the word of righteousness – you needed to grow up,” {cf, Heb 5:12}. In other words, you have never passed beyond babyhood in your spiritual development until you have come to the place where you can genuinely help another person in some aspect of their life. Now, I don’t mean just teach them. I mean really help them, deliver them, bring them out of difficulty by a word of counsel, or advice, or opening of Scripture that helps them to see something that they have never seen before.

This is the mark of maturity, and I think here is one of the great problems of the American church, particularly. Most of us suffer from what someone has described as

“prolonged adolescence merging into premature senility.” We never grow up – that is the problem.

One of the great admonitions the apostle continually makes is that Christians begin to grow up into Christ so that they are “able to instruct one another.”

Despite all this, they still needed the ministry of reminding – they needed the apostle. No matter how much their hearts desired Christ, no matter how much they knew of him, they were still subject to the very human failing of being apt to forget.

When I was traveling with Dr. Ironside, I saw in action what I had heard of previously – an exhibition of the marvelous memory that he had. For instance, he could read a poem five or six stanzas long through just twice and he would have it memorized. He demonstrated in many ways a remarkable facility for memory. (His wife used to say that his memory was so remarkable that he could even remember some things that didn’t happen at all!) But most of us are not equipped like that. Most of us have wonderful “forgetters,” don’t we? No matter how many times we hear truth, we still have difficulty remembering it, and putting it to work when we should. We need, therefore, each other to remind one another of what we have learned.

This is the ministry that Paul engages in by writing the book of Romans. “I am simply reminding you of those old things that you need continually to know.”

One point especially concerned him: He said he is concerned “that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” That is the supreme thing. In saying this, he recognizes the clear possibility

- that there is service which is not acceptable,
- that it is quite possible
 - to labor diligently as a Christian, and be engaged in many forms of activity, and
 - to do so out of earnestness, faithfulness, and even costliness in terms of time and effort,
- and yet have it totally unacceptable to God,

because the one thing that makes service acceptable is that it is sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

I think you remember when Major Thomas was here, he told us that the word *sanctified*, which I think has theological overtones that frighten us, really means, simply, “to devote something to the intended purpose for which it was made.”

- You sit on a chair and you sanctify it; you use it for the purpose it was intended for.
- When you play an organ, you sanctify it; an organ was intended to be played. You don’t attempt to type a letter with it – that would be to use it in an unsanctified way – but you play it.
- When you sanctify your shoes, you put them on your feet; that is what they were intended for.

This is the simple meaning for *sanctification*: “to put to the intended use.”

What Paul is saying here is that, if we want our lives to be acceptable to God:

- Then the only possible way in which this can be done is for our human personality to become available to the indwelling life of Jesus Christ,
- That, through the Holy Spirit, his transcendent power may be continually manifested through us to accomplish the purpose and the program that he has set before us.

He wants us to do the thing which is right in front of us – that is what we were made to do. We were not made to sit down and decide how to please God, and to work out a program of our own, and bring it to the Lord, and say, “Now, Lord, this is what I have decided I’ll do for you.” This is *un-sanctified service*. Sanctified service is to say, “Lord, here am I. Send me,” {Isa 6:8 KJV} and to present yourself to be used for the fulfillment of his program, and to the carrying out of his purpose, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, using his power and depending on his indwelling life. That is acceptable service, and this is the thing that concerned the Apostle Paul.

This is what man is made for. We have it carved in letters at the front of our platform here,

“You are not your own ...” – you were never made to be your own, and, if you think you are your own and can run your own life, you are defeating the purpose for which you were created. “You are not your own, you are bought with a price.” Therefore, acceptable service is simply to allow yourself to be available and at the disposal of the One who has the right to use you –

- As he pleases,
- In the place that he pleases, and
- Under the conditions that he chooses.

That is being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and this is what Paul was concerned about.

We continually need this reminder because the philosophy of the flesh, the Adamic theory, is that we can do all things ourselves – that we don’t need God. We find this philosophy underlying almost all the activity of the world today. We get so proud over what we have created:

- All the missiles and the marvels of modern scientific life,
- All the gadgets and the gimmicks that are available to us,
- All the tremendous knowledge that we have ferreted out during the centuries.

We become so proud of it that we think we can do everything. And when we come to the place where we think that we can do everything, then we discover that God lets us go ahead on that basis, and we have no one upon whom we can rely except ourselves. It is a very disconcerting experience to suddenly find that we are alone on the bridge of the ship and that we have no one else to seek advice from. We have to control this tremendous vessel as it makes its way across the sea of life, and it is a frightening thing. That is why men who think that way always have, underneath, a sense of uncertainty and an awareness that they are not equipped, they are not able, they are not capable. We never were made to be – that is the whole point. And the Christian life is simply one that has recognized what we were made to be, and is willing to be that. Paul says that this is “sanctified by the Holy

Spirit,” and the Spirit is ready to put that into practice.

Now, this is further illustrated in what Paul says about **the ministry of reconciling**, Verses 17-24:

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ, thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man’s foundation but as it is written,

**“They shall see who have never been told of him,
and they shall understand who have never heard of him.”**

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 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, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little. {Rom 15:17-24 RSV}

Here is a man who yearns to preach Christ in the farthest corner of the earth. He is a debtor, as he says at the beginning of this letter, to the Greeks and to the barbarians, no matter where they are. He owes them something, and, in this brief reference, he reminds us how he journeyed up and down across Asia Minor, and he crossed into Europe, and he preached in Philippi and Thessalonica, in Berea and down in Athens, then in Corinth and the city of Ephesus, and in all the little villages in between in western Asia and eastern Europe.

Now he longs to go on to Rome where he has never been, and see these Christians whom he has never seen but whom he greets by this letter. But his eye looks even beyond that – it looks on to the farthest western regions, to Spain, and wherever men have never heard the saving name of Christ. His ambition is to preach Christ where he has never been named before. He hasn’t any desire to build

on another’s foundation, but his is the heart of a pioneer. He found in Isaiah, the 52nd chapter, a verse that has seemingly become his life verse: “They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him,” {cf, Isa 52:15}. Throbbing in his heart is this passion and yearning of the apostle to reach out to all men everywhere who have never heard – that was his calling. He was called to be an apostle (a sent one) to the unexplored, the untouched regions of earth, carrying the name of Christ.

That was his calling. Yours may be very different.

This week we are going to begin a Missionary Conference, and, as the conference goes on, we trust and pray that the Holy Spirit will be continuing his work of thrusting out laborers into the harvest. We hope and pray that God will speak to the hearts of some young people here in our midst, and say to them, “I want you, and I want you out there, or there, or there” – some place in the far corners of the earth. But we are also praying and hoping that the Holy Spirit will say to others, “I want you to stay here, and work for them, and send these others out – that is your calling, your part of the work.” All of them are together in fulfilling the ministry of reconciliation which has been committed to us – that we declare to world, wherever there is a need for it, that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, and that *anyone who will* may come and receive him.

But the imperative note in what Paul says here is (and I want to stress this so we won’t get this out of focus) that, in any case,

- whether you fulfill the pioneer ministry of going out to the regions beyond, or
- whether you stay home and teach a Sunday School class and work here,

it might be Christ at work in you and through you, – not you trying to do your best for him – that is the important thing.

You notice how Paul puts it. He says, “If any part of my ministry does not stem from God’s work through me, I don’t even want to talk about it. I have nothing to say about it. It isn’t even worth mentioning.” He says, “I will not venture to speak

anything except what Christ has wrought through me.”

I want to say that this was a difficult truth for the Apostle Paul to learn. It was a long and weary way before this man, this brilliant young Pharisee, who had sat at Gamaliel’s feet, and had risen quickly to a position of high prominence in the councils of the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, ever really came to the full realization of what he says here. Even after he met Christ on the Damascus road, if you read between the lines of all the autobiographical references that he gives in his letters, you see that he didn’t immediately begin preaching Christ and allowing Christ to work through him, but there was, at first, the very great consciousness that he seemingly had so much to offer Christ. There was his background –

- He was a Pharisee.
- He had been raised a Hebrew.
- He knew all the Law – had been trained in it.
- He had standing and prominence in the school of the Sanhedrin, and he had authority.
- He knew everything!

At first there was reliance upon these things to make him an effective and profitable minister. As you trace the story through, you see how the Spirit of God was at work to show him that this wasn’t true:

- He led him off into Arabia, then brought him back into Damascus.
- There, when Paul tried to reason from the Scriptures and prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Jews wouldn’t have anything to do with him. They rejected all the brilliance of his ministry, and, finally, he had to be let down over a wall in a basket to escape the city – as though he were a common criminal.
- Then Paul came to Jerusalem and tried to join himself to the disciples there. Since the Jews wouldn’t have him, he thought that the believers would. But he found that even the disciples

wouldn’t receive him, and it was only when Barnabas came and took him by the hand and spoke for him that they would even let him in.

- Crushed and heartbroken, he went into the temple, and, there, the Lord Jesus appeared to him, and said, “Paul, get out of this city.” Paul said, “Lord, I came here to preach to these Jews. I am the one who can reach them. I was the one who held the garments of the young men when Stephen, the martyr, was slain. They will listen to me. I was on their side and now I am on the other side. They will listen to me.” But the Lord Jesus said to him, “Depart and get out of this city, for I will send you far hence to the Gentiles.”
- Paul had to go down to his home town – the hardest place to go – and, there, for some seven to ten years, he never said a word. He didn’t minister. There is no record of his doing a thing. He was simply learning that the strength and power of the ministry did not rest in his background, or his training, or his abilities in any sense. At last he began to reckon upon the indwelling life of Jesus Christ and to know that God can use any man, any woman, any person, any human being, that all God wants is a vessel, no matter what it may be like, and that God can, if that vessel is available to him, manifest through it all the marvelous power of his ministry and life. This is the secret!

When Paul learned that secret, the Spirit of God sent Barnabas back to Tarsus to bring Paul over to Antioch. There he began the marvelous ministry that is recorded for us in the pages of the Word. It was only after years that he could write these words: “I will not speak of anything in my ministry until I learn the truth that it is Christ who works through me.” This is the only thing that amounts to anything.

Who does the work, then? Well, who did the work when the Lord Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount? Who was doing the work there? When he healed the sick and cleansed the temple, and when he washed the feet of the disciples, who was it who does it? “The Son can do nothing of himself. The Father who dwelleth in me, he doeth the work” {cf, John 14:10 KJV}.

Who does the work when you try to serve Christ? When you witness to somebody? Who does the work through you? Do you? Well, then it is not worth speaking about.

- Do you only take on what you feel capable of doing because of your background, your training and education? Is that all you undertake for Christ? Well, then you won't do much.
- Do you feel that God cannot use you because you haven't been to Bible School and you don't have all the training that others have had? Or are you still trying to do your best and just thinking, "Well, if I just do my best, that will be all that is necessary." Have you become content with God's second best, as you call it, without realizing that there isn't any such thing as *second* best?

That which is not "gold, silver and precious stones is nothing more than wood, hay, and stubble," {cf, 1 Cor 3:12}. There are only two kinds: It is either that which comes from the indwelling Spirit working through you, or it is that which comes from your own self-effort trying to serve the Lord in the best way that you can – one or the other. It is either "gold, silver, and precious stones" {cf, 1 Cor 3:12}, or it is that which is only to be burned. This is the great secret.

- Do you have trouble obeying the Great Commission? I find so many Christians who are seemingly ineffective in this matter of being a witness. They hear, over and over, the words of Christ, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" {Mark 16:15 KJV}, and yet they are never able to witness to anyone.
- Do you have that trouble obeying the Great Commission? It is quite possible that you have had that trouble because you have never realized that the motive that drives us out to seek the lost is never the imperative of a divine command – that isn't enough. That is enough authority, but it isn't enough motive, it isn't enough ability. The motive that drives us out to seek the lost is *not the imperative of a divine command*, it is *the impulse of an indwell-*

ing presence. It isn't the world's need that calls us out to the regions beyond, it is the love of Christ which constrains us; that is what Paul says {see 2 Cor 5:14}. This is the ministry, you see, that is effective, and that which will indeed make us become witness of his grace.

"We cannot but speak of what God had done for us" {cf, Acts 4:20}, the early disciples said: "We can't do anything else – we have become so filled and captured by what he is to us, by all the ability that he can give to us, and by all the adequacy that he is through us to meet every situation that comes to us – we can't help saying something about it!" That is the impulse that makes us witness.

Paul speaks next of **the ministry of relieving**:

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem; they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt 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 things. When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been raised, I shall go by way of you to Spain; and I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ. {Rom 15:25-29 RSV}

These words date this letter as having been written just before those stirring events that are recorded for us in the closing chapters of Acts when Paul was in the city of Corinth on his way to Jerusalem with the offering that had been taken up for the saints of Jerusalem. We read in Acts that there had been a great famine in Judea and many of the Jewish Christians there were in danger of starving to death, and there was great suffering among them. When the word that their Jewish brethren were suffering came to the Gentile churches outside Judea that had been raised up under the ministry of Paul, they took up an offering for them, and appointed Paul and several of the other men to travel to Jerusalem to deliver the offering. Paul speaks of this considerably in his letter to the Corinthians {2 Cor 8-9}. He says that the Macedonians delighted his heart by the way they gave

– they first gave of themselves to the Lord, and then out of their deep poverty they gave liberally to his cause. So it wasn't just wealthy people who were giving – it was those who didn't have much themselves – but they were sharing together with those who were in need in Jerusalem. And Paul counted it a very high honor to be appointed to deliver this offering to the church of Jerusalem. He didn't feel it was beneath him. He thought it was a great honor. He was on his way to this ministry of relief, with gladness in his heart over the generosity of the Gentiles, and also with a great yearning that he might somehow reach unsaved Israel, as the letter shows. His heart went out, he said earlier in this letter, for those who were his “kinsman according to the flesh” {Rom 9:3 KJV} who hadn't yet known Christ.

Paul little knew what lay ahead of him. He could not foresee that the very longing of which he spoke, that was born of the Holy Spirit, would be twisted by the flesh to trick him into the only act of disobedience that is recorded in the Scriptures against this mighty apostle –

- He would end up in Jerusalem besieged by a mob thirsting for his blood,
- Spend two long, lonely years in prison in Caesarea,
- At last depart for Rome in chains as a prisoner of Caesar aboard a ship, and
- Suffer shipwreck and hardship all along the way before he would at last arrive in Rome.

Paul couldn't foresee this, but thank God for the honesty of Scripture. One of the delightful things about the Bible is the way we can trust it to tell us the truth about its heroes. It doesn't hide the blemishes of even the best of saints. Here it tells of Paul, who was so overwhelmingly desirous of being used as the instrument of God to reach Israel, even though God had sent him to the Gentiles, that he gladly undertook this ministry of relief for needy saints and went up to Jerusalem when the Spirit told him not to. As a result, he stumbled into great difficulty.

How much, therefore, he needed the ministry with which he closed this section – **the ministry of restraining:**

I appeal to you, brethren, 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, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. The God of peace be with you all. Amen. {Rom 9:30-33 RSV}

Here is a record of how God answers prayer. Paul asked that these brethren would strive together with him. It is a word taken out of an athletic contest, i.e., a wrestling contest. He asked that they exercise the ministry of prayer in restraining evil. That is what prayer is so oftentimes – a way of putting a barrier around someone and protecting them in their ministry. This is what Paul is asking for.

You'll notice that he makes three requests:

- He asked, first of all, that “I be delivered from the unbelievers” in Jerusalem. And God answered that request in his own way and time. In Acts we are told how Paul's nephew “accidentally” overheard a conversation of those men who had determined they would put Paul to death, and carried the word to Paul. Then, after being sent to the centurion over him, Paul was able to thwart that plan and escape out of Jerusalem, and out of the very jaws of death, by means of that “accidental” over-hearing of a conversation. That was an answer to prayer as these Roman Christians prayed that he would be “delivered from the unbelievers” in Jerusalem.
- Second, he asked that they pray that his service might “be acceptable to the saints.” Well, God answered that. You remember that when Paul came, James stood up and said to the believers that this was “our beloved brother, Paul,” who had come to them, and he welcomed him {cf, Acts 21:18-20}. Thus, through that intercession, the service that Paul brought to Jerusalem was accepted by the saints there.

- The third request was that they pray that he might come to Rome “with joy and be refreshed in your company.” You know how, through painful experiences, and after several years of waiting, God answered that prayer and brought Paul to Rome – even though it was in chains. But, as he came and landed on the coast of Italy, the believers in Rome came all the way out of the city and down to a little village they called “The Three Taverns,” and there they met Paul. His heart was overwhelmed with joy as he saw them – and that prayer was answered.

I wonder what would have happened if this passage had never been written and Paul had never asked them to pray for him? I wonder if the record of Acts would have been different if he had never thought to ask these believers to pray? What if the Romans hadn’t prayed for Paul? Would it have been different?

I remember Dr. Ironside telling of visiting up in northern Idaho, years ago, a little group of Christians who didn’t believe in prayer. They lived in a remote region around St. Mary’s, Idaho, and, in order to get to them, he had to cross a river where there was no bridge or any way to cross except a little boat that was rowed across to pick him up. He used to go up there once or twice a year, ride his horse down to the edge of the river, and then stand on the bank, and yell across, “Le bateau sil vous plait.” They spoke mostly French, and this meant, “Bring the boat, please.” So they would row the boat over, pick him up, and row him back across the river. Then he would have a ministry there with them for a week or so, and then he would go on. He said that, on one occasion, he had a blessed week with them.

At the close of it, he said, as he was leaving, “Now, I do wish you would pray for me. I have a heavy schedule ahead.” They said, “We don’t pray for anybody.” He said, “How is that?” They said, “We don’t believe that there is any necessity for prayer.” “Well, why is that?” he asked. “Well,” they replied, “we believe God meets our needs. God had promised that he would take care of us, so we don’t have to pray for ourselves. We believe that this promise applies to every other believer in Jesus Christ, so we don’t feel we have to pray for them. Why pray, when God has promised?” “Well,” he said, “have you ever noticed that the

Apostle Paul asked people to pray for him?” “Yes,” they said, “we have noticed that, but perhaps Paul didn’t understand all the truth in this matter.” (There are some folks who always feel they have a higher theological degree than Paul had.) Dr. Ironside said, “At any rate, I wish you would pray for me.”

Then he left and went to Minneapolis, where he contracted a very serious sickness, until he was almost at the point of death. After weeks, he recovered, and, after several months, he visited these people again. When they met him with the boat, and took him across the river, they said, “Oh, when we heard you were sick, do you know what we did? We remembered that you had asked us to pray for you, so we gathered our people together and we had prayer for you.” Dr. Ironside said, “Well, thank you, but, you know, if you had prayed for me first, I might never have been sick.”

Prayer is a mysterious thing that none of us really understands. But we do know that the apostle, with all the marvelous insight and understanding he had into the ways and purposes of God, nevertheless highly valued the prayers of others for him.

I know you are wondering if Paul ever got to Spain. Well, we don’t know for sure. There is some evidence that perhaps he did. I personally think so. But we do know that, after several more years of ministry here and there, he was taken once again as a prisoner to Rome. This time, instead of having his own private house where he was free to minister to those who came to him, he was thrust down into the dank darkness of the Mamertine Dungeon. From that deep, dark, sodden hole in the earth, he wrote his second letter to Timothy, in which he says those unforgettable words: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith,” {cf, 2 Tim 4:7 KJV}. Sensing that his departure was near, because he was soon to appear before Nero, and he knew the cruelty of that implacable tyrant, he wrote these marvelous words: “Henceforth 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,” {cf, 2 Tim 4:8 KJV}.

What a wonderful encouragement to faith this man is!

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for the example of the Apostle Paul. We pray that we may catch the emphasis that he emphasized. May we realize and discover in our own lives this marvelous secret; and, touching the well-springs of the hidden resources of deity within us, may we minister in the name of the Lord Jesus. We pray, Father, that we may stop fighting a battle that is already lost, and begin to fight one that is already won, in his strength. We pray that you will turn us from our continual tendency to move in our own fleshly efforts.

May we, instead, reckon upon his indwelling strength to meet every situation and remember that he is fully adequate and overwhelmingly competent to do through us all that needs to be done. May we reckon upon that, and thank you for it. We pray that you will teach us that there is no such thing as 'second best' in your work, but that whatsoever is not gold, silver, and precious stones is nothing more than wood, hay, and stubble. We pray that we may minister in such a way as to be acceptable in your sight. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.