

## **The Power of Partnership Romans 15:20-29**

### **Intro**

Polarized nation - not new - for decades now we have had discord and division over a very live and important issue - fanboys of Apple technology and everyone else

Merriam Webster when introducing the word sheeple into their dictionary at one time controversially used fans of apple products as examples of sheeple

While one may view apple aficionados as haughty and elitist but one cannot deny the power and influence of the Apple company. If you had invested \$10,000 in stock when the company went public in 1980 it would be worth almost 7 million dollars

Full disclosure - I am an apple man through and through across all platforms - and for those who love Windows Vista and that despicable Word and the glitchy android app platforms then I say you get what you deserve - one of the biggest mistakes of my life was switching to a Samsung Galaxy years ago, relieved only by the phone "accidentally" being smashed on my driveway with a quick purchase of another iPhone to replace it.

If you are familiar with the Apple origin story then you know that this influential company was started by 2 college dropouts both name Steve - Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak - as they worked to create a revolutionary computer in their garage in the late 70s.

There was a partnership that complemented one another - Wozniak was the hands-on computer designer and Jobs was a marketing savant who brought their computer into the public consciousness. Jobs who died in 2011 is the one revered in the corporate world for his marketing prowess and eye for design but if it wasn't for Steve Wozniak, Apple Inc. would not have launched and become the worldwide phenomena it is today. Their partnership made all the difference in their success.

This story and so many more like it are rooted in partnership for their success

Orville and Wilber Wright  
Hewlett and Packard  
McCartney and Lennon

In a similar way, partnership as prescribed in Scripture is baked into the mission and ministry of the church and it is when the church presses into healthy partnership that the reach and power of our mission makes maximum impact - far greater than any tech company.

Our text shows us something of that kind of partnership for us to examine and emulate to the glory of God

More biographical info reflecting to us that that local churches in partnership can do so much more together than alone. Partnership within this church and within our partnership in SGC and beyond looks like:

## I. Relationship

A. Context of chapter 15 he has expressed His care - encouragement

**I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. (Romans 15:14)**

1. Compelling example of encouragement
2. I SAY THIS OF YOU - SINFUL YES - EVIDENCES OF GOD'S GRACE

**God is glorified in us when we affirm the work he has done and is doing in others. (Sam Crabtree, *Practicing Affirmation*)**

B. v. 15 He says that he has written this letter to remind the original audience and also us of the grace of God - reminding ministry that is needed for even the most mature of Christians

1. All of us feel the words of the hymn writer - prone to wander Lord we feel it

C. He reminds them of his calling - grace has been given to him to be an apostle - one who was sent by Christ to the Gentiles to preach the Gospel and plant churches

D. Opens up his inner life - his psychology - what gets him up and moving in the morning - my ambition is to preach Jesus Christ where he has never been named

**[19]... from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; [20] and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, [21] but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." (Romans 15:19b-21)**

1. Perhaps surprisingly he informs them that he has fulfilled the ministry of the Gospel over thousands of miles - strategy was to plant churches in key and influential cities as church planting hubs where others would spread out and plant churches in more rural areas

**Illustration:** Talking about church planting this year - invite you to envision this church in Middletown as a hub - spokes on a wheel - this building will serve us well. **Antioch Cohort.**

- E. He has been engaged in pioneer church planting - v. 22 this is why I've been hindered from coming to you - he reiterates what he wrote at the outset:

**[11] For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—  
[12] that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.  
[13] 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. (Romans 1:11-13)**

- F. v. 23 AND 24 - all the while he has been engaged in pioneer mission and church planting - 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 helped on my journey there by you - ONCE I HAVE ENJOYED YOUR COMPANY FOR AWHILE
1. Over the last couple of years in our study of this book we have encountered the deepest, richest, most thorough unfolding of the Gospel and its implications in all of Scripture - not a mere theology textbook - Paul is not some crusty theology egghead sitting in an office and writing down his teaching - this is personal - more stunning in that he's never met these Romans - yet his care and affection are evident
    - a) Longed for years to visit them and establish relationship - he wants to enjoy their company!
    - b) For this man and every pastor who would walk in his footsteps - we are reminded that ministry is about relationship - embodied presence - an important reminder in a digital world - where emails and text messages serve as substitutes for real, physical interaction

**Illustration:** Often looks on in confusion at pastors whose priority is building their public online platform and profile while sheltered away from actual people. Visiting a church where the pastor was escorted out

**Illustration:** Preaching to empty room during the first couple of months in the pandemic. I'm not here to establish an internet ministry - I want to be with you. grateful for tech but no satisfying replacement.

**Illustration:** No pastors conference - hole

2. Paul understands and shows us a compelling example of the importance of relationships - meaningful, physical connection - for him the letters served as a way of ministering to the churches he wrote to but they were no replacement for being with the people in those churches

**[7] But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. [8] So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)**

**Illustration:** Ken Mellinger not around as much - visiting churches

**G. Application**

1. Paul has spent significant time throughout Romans teaching that healthy relationships within a church are not just about being friendly - they are rooted in our shared union with the Lord Jesus Christ - because of the Gospel - healthy relationships are about expressing that reality
2. In this season of social distancing - increasing isolation for many - let us make sure that we are pressing into relationship
  - a) Hierarchy of meaningful communication - text, email, phone call can serve - voice on the line - emotion and care
3. We will need and become all the more grateful for relationships in a world increasingly hostile to the church

**II. Shared Ministry**

- A.** v. 25-26 Paul informs the Roman Christians that he is headed to Jerusalem to bring aid to the saints in Jerusalem - MINISTER - by bringing relief to poor Christians in Jerusalem. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia have raised funds to that end.
1. Not only did they give willingly to this relief- it was their pleasure to make this contribution to minister to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem
    - a) v. 26 - pleased to make this contribution
    - b) v. 27 - pleased to do it
      - (1) Not about being wealthy:

**[1] We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, [2] for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. [3] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, [4] begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— (2 Corinthians 8:1-4)**

- B.** Not only was this shared ministry their pleasure - Paul says they owed it to them
1. The Gentile Christians in those church had received the spiritual blessings of the Jewish Messiah come from the Jewish people - they then should feel a moral obligation to serve those Christians with material blessings
    - a) Reminds of the important place that the Jewish people have in God's redemptive purposes in Christ - discernible gratefulness is appropriate - we are wild shoots grafted into the olive tree of God's covenant people
      - (1) PRIORITY OF ETHNIC HARMONY - no partiality - moving toward each other in blessing
      - b) Reciprocity - shared blessings - shared ministry
  2. This pleasure is at the heart of grace-motivated giving

**By emphasizing their delight in giving, Paul underlines the truth that genuine giving is never merely a duty; it is also a delight and a joy. (Thomas Schreiner)**

**Illustration:** Highlight how this has worked recently in our partnership in SGC - pooling resources for church planting - we may have one in the pipeline. In having surplus:

- Help a church plant in Brazil
- Serve a family living in Turkey sent out of our region
- Make a significant contribution to the building of a new Pastors College in Liberia
- Churches being planted. Churches cared for by leaders
- NEPAL

### 3. WE - YOU - ARE ENGAGED IN SHARED MINISTRY

#### C. Application

1. Inform the seemingly mundane act of regular giving - sharing in ministry!
  - a) AS IF THE GRACE OF GOD - RICHES OF CHRIST - BECAME POOR SO THAT WE THROUGH HIS POVERTY MIGHT BECOME RICH - WE HAVE THIS PRIVILEGE!

**Our bank statements are perhaps the greatest evidence of having minds that have truly been transformed by the grace of God. (Tim Keller)**

2. People asking about giving – benevolence

### III. Blessing

- A. V. 29 When I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ - sounds a little self-important? He is able to say this because of his confidence in Christ

**For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me... (Romans 15:18a)**

1. Whenever this inspired apostle connected with those whom he sought to care for this was beating in his heart - the desire for them to experience the fullness of the blessing of Christ
  2. Christ - all that he is and has done and is doing - understanding that that is the glue of partnership
- B. Let me encourage you to cultivate this way of thinking as you encounter others - no-one of us are apostles but ALL CAN LET HIS DESIRE BECOME OURS

- C. on the way to CG or to spend time with a friend - for those of us who are married - those of us who are parents - how can I bring the blessing of Christ into the lives of those I encounter
  - 1. Through reminding them of the grace of God and the promises of God which all find their yes and amen in Christ
  - 2. Through reflecting Christlike love and sacrificial kindness
  
- D. Application
  - 1. Mutual giving and receiving when we gather - how can I bring blessing into this encounter?
  - 2. This is the kind of partnership that honors and glorifies God!
    - a) In our partnership with one another in this church and through our partnership in our union of church in SGC - if our partnership reflects these qualities - relationships full of sincere love and care for one another - shared ministry locally and beyond that strengthens and blesses others and contributes to our shared mission - men and women young and old who's hearts are full of a desire for the blessings of the promises and presence of Christ for one another -  
POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP  
(1) Gospel culture plus gospel doctrine = power!

## Close

### 7. United in Fellowship, Mission, and Governance

We believe that the unity for which Jesus prayed among His people should find concrete expression among believers and churches. Indeed, the New Testament testifies to a vibrant interdependence among churches in the first century. We seek to express a similar interdependence through our common fellowship, mission, and governance. Our fellowship extends beyond mere denominational affiliation; we are committed to applying the gospel together in relationships that foster mutual encouragement, care, and a glad pursuit of Christlikeness. Our shared governance and mission protect our churches doctrinally and ethically, and enables our individual churches to do far more together than we could ever do separately.

As we pursue unity and partnership in these kinds of ways, we enter into God's purposes that have far more power and influence than even the most powerful tech company - we enter into God's plan and purposes to fill the earth with his glory!

Let us pursue relationship, let us eagerly enter into shared ministry as we seek to bring the blessing of Christ into each other's lives.

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