

Romans: The Integrity of God
A Christian at Heart
Romans 1:8-15

Paul had never been to Rome when Phoebe delivers this letter to the Christians there. Contrary to what some believe, no Apostle had been to Rome by 57 A.D (the year Romans was written), yet the church at Rome was already growing and thriving. God has a way of building His church independent of professionals. Paul, though, has a strong desire to travel to Rome to meet these Christians, *“whose faith is being reported around the world.”* As he tells them how often he prays for them, he says something interesting about himself; *“I serve (God) with my spirit”* (v.9).

What does this mean? It seems there are some (maybe many) who serve God outwardly, but their hearts are not into it. Paul was this way at one time --- a Pharisee, zealous in his obedience to the law, outwardly religious (Phil. 3:4-9), but without a softened heart. Then God caught Paul on the road to Damascus and changed him inside/out. This is what it means to be a Christian at heart. *“We are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil.3:3). **How do you know if you are serving God with your heart?**

I. You are dependent upon God for all things --- even your faith.

A Christian at heart is one who knows that even our faith in Jesus Christ comes from God. Paul thanks God *“for their faith which is reported around the world (v.8).”* Why does he not thank them? Because Jesus Christ is *“the author and finisher of our faith”* (Heb. 12:2). The Bible declares frequently that faith is a gift (Matt. 16:17; Luke 17:5; Acts 11:21; Phil. 1:29). The truth of Jesus Christ is tasteless to the natural man, because he needs new taste buds!

II. You take delight in God and your relationship with Him --- not your accomplishments.

“For God is my witness . . . that without ceasing I make mention of you in my prayers” (v.9). Christianity of the heart is not so much **the saying of prayers** as it is **an attitude of prayer**. Paul’s heart went out to these Roman Christians, and God knew what was in his heart!

III. You have desires of God, but you humbly submit to His will in all matters.

Paul had a desire to go to Rome (on many occasions), but was unable to go. I’m sure he asked God to take him there, but it had not yet happened. He tells the Romans that he intends to come to Rome again (v.13), *“if God wills.”* What Paul wanted was a good thing. God sometimes holds us back from the good things, in order to bring better things to pass. *“He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think”* (Eph. 3:20). Paul did eventually make his way to Rome *“by any means”* and God used Paul mightily.

IV. You fulfill duty to God, but you leave the results in His hands.

Paul says, *“I am a debtor both to the Greeks (civilized) and the Barbarians (uncivilized)”* in v. 14. Paul was their debtor simply because Paul *“was called by God to be an apostle to them.”* He never saw himself as being “better” than the people in Rome. On the contrary, he was anxious to see them that they might be of mutual comfort to each other. Every Christian would do well to remember that what we do, we do for our Sovereign Lord. How people respond, what success we have, the ultimate results are at His disposal, not ours.

“There is one single fact the world should never forget; no person ever repented of being a Christian on his deathbed; for it is impossible for the heart softened by God to ever harden.”