

Priorities, Plans & Prayers

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[0 : 00] Good evening everyone, really good to have you with us this evening. As Neil says, we've got a bit of a plethora of peas over the next few minutes. I hope it doesn't become too wearisome or appear too strained, but it came to me as I was studying the passage for this evening.

Three of them to look out for as we read the passage, I think they divided it up quite nicely. There will be Paul's priorities, there will be Paul's plans, and then there will be Paul's prayer.

So look out for these Paul's priorities, Paul's plans, and Paul's prayers. So let's read from Romans chapter 15, and we'll be reading from verse 14. Romans chapter 15 and verse 14.

Paul writes, I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another.

I've written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them because of the grace God gave me, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 11] Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done, by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

So from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Rather, as it is written, those who are not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand. That is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain.

I hope to visit you while passing through, and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem, in the service of the saints there.

[2 : 27] For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them.

For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task, and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.

I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will, I will come to you with joy, and together with you be refreshed.

May God of peace be with you all. Amen. Thank God I'm sure we'll bless his word as we consider it together. One of my favourite books on Romans is this one, written by the hymn writer Michael Saywer.

[3 : 42] It's got a nice pink 70s cover. I've had it for many years. And when I was a teenager, I found it particularly useful. It's very short, full of pictures and big print, and it gives a very brief introduction to the book of Romans.

What appealed to me particularly about it, was the metaphor that Michael Saywer drew for Romans. Romans, he said it's like a good meal. Your good meal starts with oysters.

Now the first time you taste oysters, you think you've just been given some salty water to swallow. They taste horrible. But I'm told if you persevere at it and you keep going, oysters become a real delicacy and something that really sets you up for the meal that's to follow.

And that's broadly what the position is in the first two and a half chapters of Romans. Something you look at and say, this is horrible. It's talking about man's sinfulness compared with God's holiness and the judgment that we rightly deserve.

And you think this really isn't very good. But when you have read through the whole Romans, come back to it, you recognize it is an essential part of the book. It is the thing that whets your appetite for what's to come.

[4 : 53] The next few chapters, from the middle of chapter 3 to chapter 8, Michael Saywer says are like roast beef. It's a good, hearty meal. Roast beef and all the trimmings. Solid meat you can get your teeth into.

And that is really satisfying. It is the heart of the gospel, as Paul writes to us about the grace that is ours through the Lord Jesus and all the wonderful blessings that come to us from that.

We then have a kosher course for three chapters, chapters 9 to 11, written specifically for the Jews. And then the dessert, which is described as fruit perfect, perfect fruit, what is the result of the work of Christ in our lives.

And it is the fruit that we should display to others. So a great meal. Michael Saywer doesn't go quite this far, but I think if we're looking at the last chapter and a half of Romans, we would say that it is the coffee and after dinner mints.

It is the time when we put our feet up a bit, relax a little bit more, and are able to chat about more personal things, talk about people that we know. John will be talking a lot about that next week in chapter 16.

[5 : 57] It is Paul writing much more personally to the church in Rome rather than the great theological treatise which has made up the bulk of the book. And as he does it, I think Paul is very aware that this is a church that he hasn't been to visit.

You got that, I'm sure, as we went through our reading. Paul was really eager to visit them. It's a church he didn't visit. And usually for those he wrote to, it's a church he also obviously didn't find.

And perhaps as he was writing and as he was explaining the gospel to them, he was thinking, well, I wonder if they're going to think this is a bit basic. Am I being condescending in the way I write to them?

And to some extent, I think that colours what comes particularly in the early verses of what we're looking at this evening. So as I said, it's priorities, plans and prayers.

And we're starting with Paul's priorities which go through from verse 14 down to verse 22. What is Paul's priority as he writes to the Romans, as he thinks about his work in the gospel?

[7 : 03] Well, the first priority I would suggest is people. It always was with Paul. Paul, as I said, is very aware of those he is writing to. And he is very aware as a minister of the gospel, as a servant of the Lord Jesus, that he wants to treat these people with real respect and to show them how much he cares for them.

And so in verse 14, as he writes, as he thinks how many they might receive his message, he wants to make clear to them, he doesn't see them as being infants in the faith. He isn't talking down to them in any way.

Rather, as he always is, he's very thankful to God for all that he's done in their lives. And he says three things about the Romans. He says you're full of goodness, you're filled with knowledge, and you're competent to instruct, or some versions say to admonish one another.

You're full of goodness. What the effect of the gospel has been in your lives is to make you good. It is to make you want to do what is right, and particularly to show the love of Christ to others and to show how much you care for them.

And very much what Paul has been writing about in chapters 12 through to 14 is what you could have gone on to the church in Rome and probably found there. People who are exercising their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church, people who showed hospitality, who showed love to others, people who had real goodness.

[8 : 30] They're also filled with knowledge. They're people who had taken the time to study the scriptures, to think through the gospel, and to understand the greatness of their salvation.

They had come to a knowledge of the Lord as Savior, and they wanted to be filled with knowledge of him as Lord as well. And finally, they're competent to instruct one another.

Some versions say to admonish. I think this speaks both of the preaching side and of the one-to-one side, of being able to talk honesty with one another and to help one another to grow in their faith.

Three things which should be evident in our church as well. They were characterized by goodness, that we are people who have a love for the Lord Jesus, and that is shown in the lives that we live in pleasing him.

People who have a knowledge of the Lord and of the scriptures and want to deepen that knowledge and come to know him better. And people also who are able to be open and honest with one another and to build one another up in our faith and instruct each other in what is right.

[9 : 36] And Paul says to the Romans, my priority, one of my priorities, is the people and I've looked at you and I'm thanking God for you. You're displaying these things and yet I think it's good to remind you of them.

Even if we feel we know the gospel very well, even if we've been many, many years in the faith, it's good to be reminded of God's greatness and of God's grace for us.

And Paul says, that's what I've been doing in the letter that I've written. So Paul's first priority is people, the people he's writing to. Priority number two is that Paul sees himself as a priest.

Now that is in some ways slightly surprising with Paul. It's not something we'd need to associate. Priesthood you think of perhaps the book of Hebrews rather than the writings that are normally attributed to Paul.

But Paul in these verses clearly sees his work among the Gentiles as being a priestly work. He says, verse 16, he gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 49] And a lot of the other words around the word he uses for minister or serve is also a word that has priestly connotations in this passage. What is Paul saying here?

He's saying that his work is to reach out to others with the gospel, particularly reach out to the Gentiles, and then to bring them to God as an offering to him.

That God would be pleased that the Gentiles had turned to him and that they were living godly lives. Remember the chart of chapter 12, Paul exhorts his listeners to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.

I think a similar idea here, but in this case, it's not the individuals presenting themselves to God. It is Paul being able to present the Gentiles to God and say the work of the Lord Jesus has been effective, not just among the Jews, but among the Gentiles.

And here are those who are worthy of being seen as a sacrifice. Not in any sense, it repeats the work of the Lord Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice that he made for us on the cross.

[11 : 59] But it is something that is going to be pleasing to God as sacrifices were when they were done in the right way with the right attitude. It is something that God can take great pleasure in that his people have come to him and Paul is able to present them as a sacrifice before God.

His work among the Gentiles was a work of the priest in presenting acceptable offerings to God. Third priority that Paul has is a word called power.

The word power is mentioned a couple of times in the past. And the power of Paul is particularly talking about here is the power of miracles, of signs and wonders. Miracles in the New Testament were never done just for effect, not done even just for the benefits of those who experienced the miracles, although obviously they were.

The miracles of the Lord Jesus, indeed of Paul, helped many people in a physical sense. But miracles ultimately were to show the power of God and to demonstrate that those who were able to perform the miracles had been sent by God, were truly God's servants.

And for Paul, as he went around the Gentiles, as he went around cities that were very pagan, among people who had little concept of the one God, the great God of heaven, and to a multitude of gods around their cities.

[13 : 23] The fact that Paul was able to display something of the power of God in the way that he worked among them, that was a really effective way of validating his ministry, of showing to these people this is something that really is from God.

So he places some stress on these verses of the fact that he had come with the power of God and what he had accomplished among the Gentiles was a result of that power and the power that would spread miraculous signs in particular was a demonstration as the people were amazed at what happened.

They were a demonstration of the power of God in Paul's life. Number four, there are five in total in this section. All peas, as I said, proclamation.

Again, a couple of times Paul talks about proclaiming the gospel. And as I said, if he showed works of power among the Gentiles, the purpose of that was so that he had a platform on which he could proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

That is Paul's job. That is Paul's calling. That is what he sees as God's purpose in his life. He gave me, he says in verse 16, the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God.

[14 : 44] And in verse 19, from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, we'll have a geography lesson in a few minutes. From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. Paul was the missionary to the Gentiles and very important to him as he went around that he was able to proclaim the gospel.

Now, Paul's normal pattern, as you know, certainly early in his ministry when he went to a new city was he went first to the synagogue and he proclaimed Jesus to the Jews who had the Old Testament background and should have understood what it was about.

Generally rejected by the Jews and then he went out and proclaimed wherever he could get a hearing among the Gentiles. But his particular ministry, he says, is to proclaim the word of God among the Gentiles.

Now, some of the most public places in the ancient world and the marketplace in Athens and Mars Hill and all over the place, Paul was able to proclaim that Jesus is the Lord, he is the Christ, he is the Son of God, he is the only way of salvation.

[15 : 55] And of course, that is our principal duty as we are in the world today, to proclaim Jesus, to let others know about him, whether it's in a public way or in a private way as we talk to our friends, that we may proclaim that Jesus is the Savior of the world, the Son of God who is able to forgive our sins.

So Paul's priority of proclamation. And then the last one on this bit, Paul was a pioneer. Paul is very clear in this passage, he didn't want to be going to places which had already heard the gospel.

Now, there is a role in missionary work for missionaries who go to places where the gospel has been preached, perhaps where the church is fairly new and immature and to teach the word and to help and to support the church in these areas.

But that wasn't Paul's work. Paul's work was to go to new places, to go throughout the Roman Empire and where they hadn't yet heard the name of the Lord Jesus, to proclaim Jesus and to see men and women coming to faith in him.

That wasn't just that he went to a place and he had a two-week gospel campaign and then he went down somewhere else. He stayed for a considerable time in places like Corinth and Ephesus to see the church established and beginning to be built up.

[17 : 16] But he very much saw that his ministry was to the unreached in the world of his day, not to those who already had the gospel. Particularly relevance of that in Romans, the gospel clearly had reached Rome through other people, there were others who had gone perhaps naturally to the centre of the empire with the gospel and Paul didn't see Rome as being his particular mission field.

Now, when he was in Rome, he did proclaim the gospel, we know he did, and he was there as a witness for the Lord Jesus, but that wasn't his particular calling, his particular work.

His work was to be a pioneer missionary. Pioneer missionaries are really, really valuable even nowadays, going to parts of the world where people don't know the gospel, parts of the world often where it is dangerous to be a missionary in places like the Middle East or China where being a missionary is a difficult and often dangerous thing and where being a Christian can be very difficult.

Still a place for pioneer missionaries in our day and we should really be praying for them as they seek to serve the Lord Jesus in this way, as well as those who go to support the church and to reach out in other parts of our world which are equally ungodly in many ways even though the gospel has reached them.

So five Ps there, people, priest, power, proclamation, pioneer. Allow me two more as I sum up this section and try and apply it for us today.

[18 : 43] It's two that Neil mentioned to us. And what comes across very clearly in this passage is that God saw a purpose of God in his life.

His sole purpose in life, he says, is to glorify God through proclaiming the word to the Gentiles and being able to present them as an acceptable sacrifice before God.

Paul had a clear sense of his calling, of what it was that God had called him to do and he was determined that he was going to fulfill that even though it might not have been what others thought would have been the right thing.

This was God's purpose for him and Paul was determined that he was going to pursue it to the end. Application for us. Important that we understand God's purpose for us as much as we can.

That we are very much looking for what is it that God wants me to do? What are the areas of service with which God has called me? This is something I've struggled with a bit in recent years.

[19 : 50] When you're in church leadership and I don't think it's just in this church or almost any church you tend to be dragged along a bit by what needs to be done. You see a need that needs to be met and you feel I'm able to meet that.

And perhaps at times not a lot of it apart from being called to be a church leader which is a very high calling but in the day to day the detail stuff of it a lot of it you perhaps don't immediately see the purpose behind it how God is leading you in it.

And I've certainly felt over the last few years that from my point of view there are some things I feel God has particularly called me to which are not particularly part of being church leadership in the church.

Here's things like Basic Bank and Ferrywell one and two others as well which I felt this is God's purpose for me at this point in my life. And I think it's good if all of us can take that step back and think what is it that God is calling me to do?

Is my life just dictated by events by things that happen in the church and it's go along with them and I don't really have any purpose any plan for my life?

[21 : 00] Or am I looking very deliberately and saying what is it that God has laid on my heart for me to do? How can I particularly serve? And whether it's in the church or whether it's outside the church.

Paul's purpose I said was very clear to him and he was single-minded in pursuing it. I think too many of us as Christians just drift along and we're not deliberate enough in looking to God for his guidance and to know what it is that he has planned for us for acts of service acts of worship to him as we would seek to live lives that are pleasing to the Lord Jesus.

Now you may feel that it's very clear for you and if you do and forgive me for labouring it for me it wasn't for me it was something I felt I need to think about I need to before God think about what it is that God wants me to do.

And unlike the purpose there is passion. If you see a purpose in something you're much more likely to be passionate about it. If you feel this is something that God has really called me to then you're going to put your whole heart into it.

And don't we see that with Paul? That with the Gentiles here is something that he has completely poured himself into. He has travelled thousands of miles with the gospel.

[22 : 23] Plans to travel thousands more which we'll come on to in a minute. He has a real desire that throughout the world the name of Christ should be known and should be worshipped and the Lord should be followed.

He has as we read any of his letters such a deep love and commitment to those who have come to know the Lord Jesus through his work and even those he hasn't yet met.

He has a passion for the work that God has called him to do. And we too need to have that kind of passion in our Christian lives. Not that we become what people might call passionate in the sense that we would think of in the world there's no harm in that but some of us are more understated and quiet perhaps particularly in Scotland but that we have a real desire to do things well for the Lord Jesus and that it is something that really motivates us and that drives us on.

That we're not half-hearted in the work that God has called us to do. We're not happy with second best with doing a bit but not going the whole way. Paul was absolutely passionate in his work among the Gentiles and whatever work God has called us to do we similarly should be passionate about as we fulfil God's purpose in our lives.

So Paul's priority is summarised by his purpose and by his passion. You'll be pleased to know that's the end of the Ps apart from the main headings and we won't have any more this evening.

[23 : 55] I want to move on now and look at Paul's plans and we have a bit of geography. Hope you can see that map reasonably well. It's a kind of modern map in terms of the places that are named on it but it's a map of Paul's work and Paul's ministry.

So a number of places number one is Corinth. Corinth almost certainly was the place from which Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. So this is where Paul is now in Corinth in Greece.

Number two I'm sure he recognises Rome Rome for which Paul was writing and the place where he had that deep longing to go to. Number three again you might have a good stab at is Jerusalem and so Paul has a desire to go to Jerusalem the mother church is in Jerusalem and he wants to go there for a particular purpose we'll come to in a minute.

Number four is the one you might have a little more difficulty placing and it's the perhaps slightly unfamiliar name in the passage Illyricum. So broadly speaking in modern terms that's Albania it's a bit of Bosnia and perhaps a little bit of Croatia in there as well as that kind of Baltic region around what used to be Yugoslavia by and large and that was the kind of far extreme of where Paul had been in his missionary journeys and number five of course on the left is Spain.

So Paul is writing from one to two from Corinth to Rome and he says I have preached the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum and that's a distance of about 1400 miles and remember Paul wasn't going around in planes or terrains he was going very often on foot or by ship and he was going backwards and forwards a lot of the time he had travelled an enormous distance with the gospel and that is what he really brings out in the early verses of the passage.

[25 : 57] But Paul's ultimate desire is to go to Spain Now if Jerusalem to Illyricum is about 1400 miles I would guess Jerusalem to Spain is maybe something like 2000, 2500 miles it's a very long way and yet Paul sees Spain as being strategic in the gospel Now Spain in that day was an important place Seneca who was Nero's tutor came from Spain many of the more intellectual people in the ancient world came from indeed a couple of emperors eventually would come from Spain so it was an important place that obviously hadn't yet been reached by the gospel and Paul thought here is somewhere that I could go to So Paul's plan was to go from Corinth to Spain but he wanted to go via Jerusalem So he started in Corinth in the middle of the map he heads down to bottom right to Jerusalem and then he's going to head all the way back up to top left to Spain and by taking him on the way as well why would

Paul want to do such a long journey why bother going back to Jerusalem when his ultimate purpose was to get to Spain via Rome and the answer to that in the passage is that Paul has been taking a collection among the churches in Macedonia and Achaia broadly in Greece the church in Jerusalem was going through difficult times there were a number of Christians in great poverty and Paul said to the Gentile believers here's the opportunity for you to enjoy fellowship with the church in Judea here's an opportunity for you to repay some of the debt that you owe to them and Paul very much saw the Gentiles as owing a debt to the Jews those who had first heard the gospel and first proclaimed the gospel who for many years had been God's people and from whom the Messiah had come Paul saw that the Gentiles had some kind of debt that should be paid to the Jews and so when he heard of the poverty in Judea

Paul had this collection some churches like Philippi gave very willingly and very generously others like Corinth gave slightly more grudgingly but when Paul exhorted them it appears that they did give and he was able to say that they gave happily in the end and Paul had this probably quite substantial sum of money that he wanted to get to the church in Judea in Jerusalem and he felt it was really important that he went there personally with it now we might think for Paul the obvious thing to do was to get Timothy or Titus or one of the others he could trust and get them to take the gift to Jerusalem while Paul headed off to Spain it has to be said that many of Paul's accompanied people felt the same thing because there was a prophecy from a guy called Agabus who said that if Paul went to Jerusalem he would be bound and would be handed over to the Gentiles and look and Paul's companion said to Paul you really don't want to go there then do you and Paul said no I'm going whatever happens to me

I'm going to Jerusalem I am taking this gift to them personally this gift was really important to Paul it was important partly because he cared about his people the Jews and he wanted them to be have some relief in their poverty and a great Christian duty to give all help we can to those who are going through times of poverty it was important to him too as coming from the Gentile church as being from them an indication of the respect that they had for the Jewish church and I said for the debt that was paid that was due to the Jewish Christians but it was particularly important to Paul in terms of how the Jews received it and we come to the prayers that is a lot of what Paul is praying about Paul was really quite concerned that the gift might go to Jerusalem and be given to the Jewish Christians and they would say no we're not taking this we're Jews we don't take anything from the

Gentiles it wouldn't be right for us to do it take it away we're having nothing to do with it and if that were to happen that would destroy much of what Paul had spent his ministry trying to build up he had presented that there is one church we are all one in Christ Jesus and whether we're a Jew or a Gentile it really doesn't matter because we're all accepted by God on the same basis and so it's really important to him that when the gift went to Jerusalem it was well received by the Christians in Jerusalem they recognised the concern the Gentiles had for them and that they recognised this was another evidence that there was one church one Lord and there weren't two separate groups Jews and Gentiles within the church who really still didn't get on with one another and I think that's why Paul planned to go to Rome and then to Spain but with a detour through Jerusalem to go personally to take the gift and to show the

[31 : 18] Jews just how seriously he took it and the unity that there was in the church and so Paul made his plans well we don't know if he got to Spain and he may well have there's a lot of church tradition that says he eventually did get to Spain we don't know we do know he got to Rome but he got to Rome as a prisoner because when he was in Jerusalem there was a great deal of trouble stirred up against him he appealed to Caesar and he was eventually taken to Rome and his initial imprisonment there under house arrest later of course martyred for his faith in Rome but he made his plans and God in one sense honoured these plans but honoured them in a different way from how Paul might have envisaged very simple lesson for us there it's good for us to plan and if we just drift along as Christian is talking about we really won't get very far in service for the Lord Jesus but we must recognise we make our plans and with the understanding that God knows better than we do how they may best be brought to fulfilment and it may not happen in the way that we expect

Paul's plans Jerusalem then Rome and then Spain and perhaps eventually he accomplished all that finally last few minutes Paul's prayers in almost all his letters Paul encourages the Christians to pray for him and he makes it clear that he prays for them as well even the churches like in Colossae where Paul hadn't been didn't know most of the people he was very faithful in his prayer for them and he was very aware of how dependent he was on their prayers for him and so in the final verses of this chapter from verse 30 onward Paul talks about his prayers and the prayers of God's people and the first thing is he talks about prayer as a struggle now the captioner says struggling with God I'm not sure that is what Paul is talking about here I'm not sure this is a kind of Jacob moment where Jacob's wrestling with God and Paul's imagining we need to wrestle with God as well

I think rather he's saying that when we come to pray we don't do it lightly we don't do it half-heartedly we come to pray and to see it as a real struggle as we bring to God perhaps with tears with longings in our heart and the things which are most precious to us and so Paul says you in Rome you're not going to go to Jerusalem you're probably not going to go to Spain but be with me as I go and as I probably will have difficulties and struggles be with me in that struggle and the way that you can be part of it is by struggling in prayer by wrestling in prayer by bringing to God with fervency and with real desire the ministry that Paul has and praying for God's blessing as he goes about it and two things he particularly wants them to pray for as he goes to Jerusalem he wants them to pray for his protection and pray verse 31 pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea

Paul recognised that wherever he'd gone in the ancient world there were Jews who were out to get him and he had suffered stoning and beatings and many other things as he travelled round with the gospel so he prayed asked him to pray for his protection while he was protected eventually there was the riot and the people tried to get him but he was protected by the Romans ultimately and he emerged safely from Jerusalem as he later went to Rome and he says also as we just talked about that he wanted them to pray for unity to pray that the gift that he was taking with him to Jerusalem would be favourably received by the church that the church in Jerusalem would recognise the unity that there was among all Christians in the Lord Jesus two things we can pray for as well as we come before God pray for those who go into difficult situations now difficult situations might be those where there is physical danger the pioneer missionaries I talked about earlier on a lot of people in our own country who go into situations where it's difficult to talk about Jesus and perhaps it can subject them to some ridicule or some difficulties

I'm thinking particularly of people like teenagers in schools often standing up for Christ and that can be a very very difficult place to be a witness many in workplaces as well we should be praying for and supporting one another in these things that we may be protected by God that we may be given a good reception among those whom we would seek to reach but praying also for unity that as a church and with other Christians who love the Lord Jesus and to proclaim the gospel that we may be united and that there may not be divisions among us which really shouldn't be there not nowadays divisions of Jews and Gentiles but perhaps denominational divisions divisions over particular doctrines which are secondary and not fundamental to the gospel these kind of things we should seek to be together as Christians following and serving the Lord Jesus and anything we can do to promote that unity among Bible believing gospel proclaiming Christians is something that should be a priority for us as it is for Paul and we should be praying for it praying perhaps particularly for organisations which seek to bring churches together and organisations where lots of different Christians work together scripture union that kind of thing praying for para church organisations

[37 : 05] Bible sites evangelical alliance and so on but praying just generally that in our area too that there may be a unity among Christians even though we disagree on secondary things that we may be united in our love for the Lord Jesus and then finally in Paul's prayers there is joy and peace pray that I may come to you with joy or pray or pray that I may receive so that I may come to you with joy by God's will and in your company be refreshed and the God of peace be with you all these two go together don't they joy and peace if we have one there's a good chance that we have the other the joy of our salvation in the Lord Jesus and all that that brings to us is very strongly linked to the peace that we have with God and the peace that God can bring through his spirit in our hearts and lives and we should be praying for one another and for

Christians around the world that we will experience the joy and peace that Jesus gives to us both great themes in the Lord's upper room ministry to his disciples that he left them peace and that they would have real joy and these are things that we should pray for and that Paul prays for regularly as he goes to the churches so Paul's priorities Paul's plans Paul's prayers what are our priorities what purpose do we see of God in our lives have we thought of that are we before God seeking his will for our lives and are we then passionate about what God has called us to do as we make plans are we aware that our plans can only come to fruition if they're in the will of God and he may well lead us our circumstances in a different way from what we expect and above all that we can have purpose we can have plans but unless everything is infused with prayer and we are really struggling before God and fervent in our prayers to him then we can't be expecting the blessing that he is so eager to give to us let's be a people of prayer as we are a people of purpose and a people with plans for the future let's pray together father we thank you for your word we thank you for

Paul and for this great work that he had among the Gentiles that he saw that as very much his work and his calling to go where the name of Christ wasn't yet known and we thank you for the tremendous blessing that was to the early church and for how that has really shaped so much of church history that Paul reached out beyond the confines of Judaism that he brought the gospel to the Gentiles and that it has since spread throughout the world help us to have that sense of being called by you help us to understand what your purpose is in our lives help us to be passionate in seeking to fulfil it and help us to particularly to be a people of prayer that we may join others in their struggles through our prayers that we may support one another through our prayers that through our prayers there may be real unity of among us and that there may be among us too a real peace and joy in the Lord Jesus thank you for our time together we commit ourselves to you we pray that what has been from yourself this evening may be remembered and may make a real difference in our lives in the coming days and weeks we give you our thanks in

Jesus name Amen You you you you you