

# PAUL'S MINISTRY IN ROME, PART I

## ROMANS 1:8–15

### INTRODUCTION

We've spent a number of weeks studying **Paul's introduction** to his letter to the Romans.

I've argued throughout that Romans is **the greatest letter ever written** because it **explains, applies, and exalts** in the greatest message ever proclaimed—the gospel.

As we recall all that we had studied in the **first 7 verses**, we are able to answer the question **why Romans matters to us**.

**Romans matters** to you and to me for **three reasons**:

1. Because Paul wrote it
2. Because it's about the gospel, and
3. Because of its intended audience

We have little doubt that the letter was treasured by its **original historical audience**, but we also learned that it should be treasured by us as we share in a **common spiritual identity** with Paul's audience.

Paul described the **spiritual identity of his audience** in three ways:

- i. Effectually called
- ii. Eternally loved
- iii. Exclusively set apart

As much as what those three descriptions identify you, **Paul wrote his letter to you.**

**Therefore, Romans matters.**

With that in mind, we continue in our study to the **next section of Romans.**

Paul has finished the **typical formalities** that were expected in a **letter of that time** by introducing himself as the **author** and the Roman Christians as his **audience**, along with his **greeting** which he reshaped into a prayer for his audience.

**But now**, with those formalities taken care of, Paul continues with **further introductory material.**

In **verses 8–15**, Paul has not yet got to the body of his letter, but moves from the **formal introduction** of his apostolic ministry and gospel message to **now introduce his plan and purpose** to visit the church in Rome.

As we know, Paul had **a number of purposes** in writing this letter, but they **all centred on his desire to visit Rome.**

When we study the New Testament epistles, we look for **two related but distinct features**—the **purpose**, or purposes, and the **occasion.**

In our overview of Romans, we found that there were **multiple reasons** that Paul wrote his letter.

There are **at least five purposes** that we can discern:

- a. Past battles in Galatia and Corinth
- b. The coming crisis in Jerusalem
- c. The need to secure a missionary base for the work in Spain
- d. The importance of unifying the divided Christian community in Rome around the gospel
- e. Misguided attacks against his theology as being anti-law and perhaps anti-Jewish.<sup>1</sup>

While the **purposes** provide us with **the reasons that Paul wrote his letter**, the **occasion** describes **the situation that gave rise** to Paul's decision to write Romans.

The occasion refers to the **events or circumstances** surrounding the letter's writing.<sup>2</sup>

The particular circumstance that seems to have **prompted Paul to write** to the believers in Rome was **his intention to visit them at long last**.

This next section, then, **introduces his plan and purpose to visit Rome**, and his hope in being able to visit them **after many failed attempts** is what led him to write his letter.

In other words, this section explains to his original audience **why he was writing to them**, and **what he hoped to achieve** in visiting them.

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 85.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Matthew S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 90.

After formally introducing his apostolic ministry and gospel message, Paul is now focused on **his anticipated ministry in Rome**.

Though he has many things to say, they all fall under **two headings**—

**Paul's practice of prayer**, and  
**Paul's plan to visit Rome**.

Under those two headings, there is much that we can learn from the apostle about **thanking God** for His gospel work of calling to Himself people from among all the nations, and about **the value of fellowship** among believers as God uses them to strengthen and encourage one another.

So with that in mind, let's examine the details of **verses 8–15** and **Paul's anticipated ministry in Rome**.

**Now**, I'm going to let you know at the outset that we're going to study these verses over two weeks, so in **part one** today we'll focus on **verses 8–10** and Paul's practice of prayer.

## 1. PAUL'S PRACTICE OF PRAYER (8–10)

In the first three verses of this section, we get an **incredible insight** into Paul's practice of prayer.

This is a window into the apostle's prayer life.

### i. Giving thanks to God

It begins with an **expression of his thankfulness** for the believers in Rome.

Look at verse 8—**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.**

As many have pointed out, Paul starts out with, "**First,**" but **never actually gets around** to "second" in the letter.

However, the word Paul uses can also refer to **priority instead of sequence**.<sup>3</sup>

In that case, he's saying something like, "**first of all,**" or "**most importantly.**"

As Paul starts to describe his plan and purpose for visiting, the **most important thing** he wants the Roman Christians to know is that **he is thankful for them.**

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 44.

**It was common for Paul** to express thankfulness for his audience when writing his letters.

In fact, we find some form of thanksgiving **in all his letters, except for his letter to the Galatian churches.**

To the churches in Galatia, Paul had a **sternly-worded rebuke** for abandoning the gospel.

**Turn quickly** and read **Galatians 1:6-7** with me—

**<sup>6</sup> I marvel that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel,  
<sup>7</sup> which is really not another, only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.**

What makes that rebuke all the more astonishing is that Paul could offer thanks for **even the church in Corinth**—despite their tolerance of gross sexual immorality, their drunken, divisive conduct during their love feasts, and the “charismatic chaos” of their worship services as they abused the gifts of prophecy and tongues.

**Turn** to **1 Corinthians 1:4-8** and follow along—

**<sup>4</sup> I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>5</sup> that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all word and all knowledge,  
<sup>6</sup> even as the witness about Christ was confirmed in you,  
<sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any gift, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
<sup>8</sup> who will also confirm you to the end, beyond reproach in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul found **reason to give sincere thanks to God** for the churches he served in his apostolic ministry, and he was tremendously thankful for the church in Rome, which is why he let them know, **“first of all.”**

He wanted the Christians in Rome to know that **when they came to mind**, the most important thing that he did was give sincere thanks to God for them.

**Now**, we should note that Paul gave thanks, as **verse 8** says, **“for you all.”**

That must **certainly continue Paul’s theme** of stressing the **unity between Jew and Gentile** in Christ.

As we recall the division within the Roman church, it makes sense for Paul to **stress his indiscriminate thanksgiving** for both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

However, it also implies that Paul was thankful for the **most mature saint as well as the newest convert.**

**Turn** to **chapter 16** and the list of **Paul’s personal greetings** to see what I mean.

Paul is greeting members of the church who are known to him.

In **Romans 16:5**, Paul greets **“Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.”**

Then in **verse 7**, he greets, **“Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding to the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”**

Turn back to **chapter 1** as we can now see that Paul's thankfulness for "**all**" the believers in Rome was not only an **indiscriminate thankfulness** for both Jewish and Gentile Christians, but he was **also thankful for every believer in Christ**, regardless of their maturity.

The church in Rome had some outstanding saints as members, but Paul was **not expressing** his thankfulness for the church's **maturity or piety**.

He was **simply giving thanks** for the fact that there were Christians in Rome.<sup>4</sup>

For Paul, it was **a remarkable thing** that God had placed believers in Rome, that He had planted a church in the capital of the Empire, and that the gospel was being proclaimed from such a strategic place **despite Rome's political power and pagan practices**.

**In our day**, it would be like our amazement that there is a faithful, Bible-believing, gospel-proclaiming church in Washington D.C., despite the political and religious powers that oppose it.

Or to put it in our context **here in South Africa**, it's like our amazement that there are faithful, Bible-believing, gospel-proclaiming churches in **Cape Town**, despite its worldly, pagan culture.

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, Sixth Edition (London; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 32.

Or our amazement that there are faithful, Bible-believing, gospel-proclaiming churches in even here in **Pretoria and Centurion**, despite the proliferation of **mainline Dutch Reformed churches and Pentecostal and Charismatic churches** that **peddle a false gospel**.

Paul recognised how incredible it was for there to be a church in Rome and **he thanked God for every believer** who was a **member of that faithful church**.

As Paul writes in the **second half of verse 8**, he thanked God, **“because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.”**

Though Paul is obviously using **hyperbole—or deliberate exaggeration**—here, he simply means that Christians throughout the **Mediterranean world of the Roman Empire** had heard of the church in the capital of Rome.

Of course they had! It was amazing to think of the **gospel flag planted** in the heart of the Empire.

Paul refers to the report of their **“faith,”** but in **Romans 16:19** he switches the language to say that, **“The report of your obedience has reached to all.”**

**There is no contradiction** since Paul has already used the term **“obedience of faith”** to describe the way God’s chosen people respond to the gospel.

Faith is an act of obedience, and daily, progressive obedience is produced by genuine faith as the gospel transforms God’s people.

It was this **all-encompassing transformation** through conversion and progressive sanctification among the Roman Christians that the “**whole world**” had heard about.

**So far we've passed over** the most important phrases in this verse, as Paul writes, “**I thank my God through Jesus Christ...**”

Paul **didn't offer his thanks to the Romans**, as if they were the ones who deserved the praise for their faith.

Rather, Paul **offered his thanks to God** as the one who was saving His chosen people from among even those in the city of Rome.

**To use the spiritual identity** we studied last week, Paul was thankful for those who were **effectually called by God** through His power in the gospel because they were **eternally loved** by Him.

**That's the point**—that's why Paul thanked God—because the **wonder and amazement of a faithful church in Rome** was **because of God's work through the gospel**, and therefore He was the one who deserved the thanks.

So for Paul, thanksgiving was the **outworking of his theological convictions**.

He praised God for saving His people because he knew that **it was a work of God, not the work of man**.

**Neither** the one proclaiming the gospel, nor the ones responding to the gospel deserve any praise, since the power for salvation in the gospel is God's.

**Turn and look** at what Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 3:5-7**—

**5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to each one.**

**6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.**

**7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.**

According to **Romans 1:8**, Paul not only gave thanks to God, but did so **“through Jesus Christ.”**

In other words, **Jesus Christ is the means** by which Paul can offer his thanks to God.

## **What does he mean by that?**

Paul's thanksgiving was the **outworking of his theological convictions**, not only in that God is the one who deserves to be thanked, but also that **Jesus Christ is the one through whom we approach God.**

Christ is the one who has **created the access to God** for so that we can **offer Him our thanks.**<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 60.

That's what the author meant in **Hebrews 13:15**,  
“**Through Him** [Jesus Christ] **then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess His name.**”

**In short**, Paul's practice of prayer was **transformed by the gospel**.

**Now**, as we consider what we have just discovered from **verse 8**, we can see that Paul's practice of prayer is **firstly characterised by giving thanks to God**.

Elsewhere, Paul teaches us that our prayers should also be characterised by giving thanks to God as our practice of prayer is transformed by the gospel and our theological convictions.

**Turn briefly** to **Colossians 3:16-17** so I can show you where Paul states this explicitly—

<sup>16</sup> **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly** [in other words, let the gospel message transform your convictions and conduct], **with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with gratefulness in your hearts to God** [that is, the gospel should produce a general attitude of being grateful to God].

<sup>17</sup> **And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**

That is Paul telling the Colossians that their **prayers should be characterised by giving thanks** to God as their practice of prayer is **transformed by the gospel** and their theological convictions.

Paul states the command simply in **Ephesians 5:20** that we should, “**always [give] thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.**”

And in **1 Thessalonians 5:18**, Paul exhorts that, “**in everything [you must] give thanks, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**”

Therefore, just as we see in Paul’s own practice of prayer, **your prayers should also be characterised** by giving thanks to God, especially as your prayers are transformed by the gospel and your theological convictions about God and Christ.

### **What does it look like?**

When you pray, your prayers contain more than just a **shopping list of personal needs** that you are asking God to meet.

When you pray, you pray and **thank God for the progress of the gospel**, whether on the foreign mission field, or even here at home when you hear the reports of a faithful, Bible believing church being planted—you praise God, through Christ, because He is working to save His people through the gospel in ways that should stun and amaze us.

**One more implication**, as you think of Paul’s practice of thanking God in prayer, remember that we as a church ought to be the kind of Christians that Paul would be thankful for.

Let’s not be like the church in **Corinth**, and certainly not like the churches in **Galatia**, but let’s be faithful like the church in **Rome** so that others will thank God for His work in us.

## ii. Asking God for help

As you look at **verses 9–10**, you'll see what Paul continues to **refer to his practice of prayer**.

His prayers are not only characterised by giving thanks to God, but they are also **characterised by asking God for help**—especially for **His help in the ministry of the gospel**.

**Notice** what Paul writes—

<sup>9</sup> **For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how without ceasing I make mention of you,**

<sup>10</sup> **always in my prayers earnestly asking, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.**

**Paul links** what he writes here in **verse 9** with the **previous verse**, now making a **very solemn affirmation** of the truth that he is thankful for the Roman Christians.

**In other words**, Paul appeals to God, as if he was **calling God as a witness in court**, since He is the one who can testify or prove that Paul always thinks of the Romans when he prays.<sup>6</sup>

**Before Paul gets to stating** what he calls on God to witness, he inserts a **statement about the sincerity** of his service to God.

It will become clearer as we work through these verses, but **Paul isn't jumping around topics like he has an attention deficit**.

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<sup>6</sup> Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1973), 15.

He's not chasing **the next shiny thought** that pops into his mind.

Rather, as Paul begins to explain that his practice of prayer **includes asking God for help**, he's thinking very specifically of **the help that God gives to enable gospel ministry**.

Therefore, **Paul remains on topic** so that before he explains that he prays frequently, asking for God's help to visit Rome, he thinks it worth stating that **he serves God in the gospel as an act of worship**.

That's what he means in **verse 9** when he says that he serves God, "**in my spirit in the gospel of His Son.**"

The word Paul uses for "**serve**" focuses attention on the **vertical aspect of his service**.

That is, Paul is emphasizing that his service, or ministry, must be thought of **vertically as an offering of worship to God**.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, the word can even be **translated as "worship."**

We can find this idea that **serving God is an act of worship** throughout scripture.

In the Ten Commandments, in **Exodus 20:5**, Moses writes, "**You shall not worship [idols] or serve them.**"

Moses viewed the concepts of "worship" and "service" as **interchangeable, or synonymous**.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 60–61.

Paul evidently believed the same, as we see later in this epistle in **Romans 12:1**, “**Therefore I exhort you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**”

**Here in this verse**, the **translators couldn't decide** between “service” and “worship” and so translated the **one Greek word into an expanded**, “service of worship.”

Now it's the **verbal form of the same Greek** word that we find in **Romans 1:9**.

There Paul continues to say that he serves God as an act of worship in his “**spirit**.”

This word refers to the **inner man, the spirit**, as opposed to the **outer man of the body**.

The Bible sometimes refers to the man with the word “**heart**,” so Paul is saying something like, “**I serve God as an act of worship with my whole heart.**”

**In other words**, there is **nothing superficial** about Paul's apostolic ministry.

He serves God with his innermost being, **with all his might**, as opposed to serving Him **insincerely, as a mere external service**.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 58.

**One commentator** even insightfully pointed out that we can consider **Paul's praying as being the inward side** of his apostolic service, which is contrasted with **preaching the gospel as the outward side** of his service.<sup>9</sup>

Once again, Paul's practice of prayer was the **outworking of his theological convictions.**

Paul's belief that **God is the one whose power saves** His people through the gospel led, **firstly**, to Paul giving thanks to God and now, **secondly**, to Paul asking for God's help in gospel ministry.

**So to put it simply**, Paul served God as an act of worship, with wholehearted sincerity, and did so in **complete dependence upon God which he expressed through prayer.**

As Paul continues, he **clarifies** that the service he has in mind is specifically the service he offers to God **in his ministry of the gospel.**

That's why we writes, "**in the gospel of His Son.**"

**The focus of Paul's ministry is the gospel**, and once more he emphasises that the **central focus of the gospel is Christ.**

The gospel of Paul received **from God is about Jesus Christ** and His atoning work on the cross.

The gospel announces that what **the Father ordained** by His eternal love, **the Son accomplished** in His saving work.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 77.

**Now**, there is a **clear implication** that we should consider **in order to apply this to our own lives.**

When you and I think of worshipping God, we often incorrectly think of worship as **limited to the songs we sing** together on a Sunday.

The corporate worship of the church in song is certainly important, but **our worship of God is incomplete** if it does not include serving God in the gospel.

Of course, none of us have been called as apostles like Paul, so our service in the gospel is going to look a little different to Paul's.

Nevertheless, if you are not intentionally using your spiritual gift along with the resources of time and money **to serve the progress of the gospel**, then **your worship is deficient.**

To be clear, Paul is not calling you to **a mere superficial, external, hypocritical service.**

Like the apostle, you ought to be able to say, **"I serve God as an act of worship with my whole heart."**

That service, though, **must serve God in the gospel in fulfilment of the Great Commission** to make disciples of all nations.

Of course, **it is going to vary** from others in church, depending on your giftedness, resources, and circumstances.

Whether it is evangelising the unbelievers among whom you live, or labouring in the cause of world missions, **it begins in the local church** and **always includes praying to God** for the progress of the gospel.

**You must worship God as you serve Him in the gospel.**

**Now**, with all that, we **return to the focus of Paul's practice of prayer**, as he calls God to witness and assure the Roman Christians of his truthfulness when he says, in **verse 9**, **“without ceasing I make mention of you.”**

This is another example of **hyperbole**, but Paul's **intended meaning is clear**.

His prayers for the believers in Rome were **unceasing, unvarying, not sporadic or inconsistent**.

Paul wasn't walking around **muttering mindlessly repetitive prayers**, but he was praying for the church **regularly, and even frequently**.

**We might initially think** that Paul is simply restating what he said in **verse 8**, but while he would certainly have given thanks for the church in Rome every time he prayed for them, he **actually wants God to assure the church** of his frequent prayers for **God's help to visit them**.

We see that clarified in **verse 10**, **“always in my prayers earnestly asking, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.”**

The first phrase here, “**always in my prayers earnestly asking,**” **shouldn't be understood** to me that Paul prayed about his plans to visit Rome every time he prayed.

Rather, it serves to emphasise that **whenever Paul prayed for the believers in Rome**, he asked that **God were grant him the opportunity to visit them.**

It wasn't a begrudging request, but **Paul's sincere desire** to serve God by ministering the gospel to the church in Rome.

At this point, it's clear that **Paul's practice of prayer** was **characterised by two things**—giving thanks to God, and asking God for help.

Both were the **outworking of his theological convictions** about God and the gospel.

Here in **verse 9–10**, we can now see that Paul asked for God's help specifically in gospel ministry, because Paul viewed that ministry as an act of worship.

So his prayers **represented an act of serving in themselves**—praying for the progress of the gospel—as well as Paul's **attitude of dependence upon God.**

Paul prayed with dependence because Paul viewed God as **the sovereign in control** of not only **salvation**, but also **circumstances.**

Last Sunday we explored Paul's theological convictions that **God exercises His sovereign will over salvation** by **effectually calling** those whom He has **eternally loved** and chosen.

Now we see Paul's conviction that God exercises his sovereign will over circumstances, **as He providentially orders Paul's life and ministry**—just as He does ours.

By providence, we mean that **God ordains and controls everything that happens**.<sup>10</sup>

**God is meticulously guiding all creation** so that it fulfils His intended purposes.<sup>11</sup>

Paul firmly believed this, and so he knew that his ministry plans, **even his long-held desire to visit Rome, were in God's hands**.

As an expert scholar on the Old Testament, Paul would certainly have held the view that Solomon expresses in **Proverbs 16:9**, **“The heart of man plans his way, but Yahweh directs his steps.”**

**Turn** to **James 4** where we find the brother of Jesus expressing this conviction clearly in **James 4:13-15**—

**13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”**

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Gregg R. Allison, “Providence,” in *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 175.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 935.

**14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are a vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.**

**15 Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.”**

When it came to Paul's life, **and particularly to his ministry plans**, he held the firm conviction that **God was providentially ordering his circumstances** through His sovereign control.

In **Acts 18:21**, Luke records that **Paul had visited Ephesus** for the first time and found profitable ministry there, but he was nevertheless constrained to leave them.

**He hoped to visit them again** in service of the gospel, but he expressed that desire in the words, **“I will return to you again if God wills.”**

Similarly, Paul had to **invest a great deal of time into shepherding** the troubled church of Corinth, but he would always remind them that his plans to visit were **not a matter of personal desire, but of God's providence**, as he says in **1 Corinthians 4:19**, **“I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills.”**

So once again, this **theological conviction of Paul's was worked out** into his plans and his prayers.

As we consider our own plans and prayers in light of God's sovereignty, we need to **follow Paul's example** and **rest in God's providential ordering** of our lives and circumstances.

Turn to **chapter 15** and there in **verse 32** we see that Paul wrote again that he hoped and planned to visit the Roman church and to, “**come to you in joy by the will of God.**”

As you look earlier in the chapter, though, Paul actually **explains one of the main reasons** he had been **provisionally prevented** from visiting Rome.

In **verses 18-19**, Paul explains that God have him **unanticipated success** in preaching the gospel—

**18 For I will not be bold to speak of anything except what Christ has brought about through me, leading to the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,**

**19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and all around as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.**

**Paul worked tirelessly to preach the gospel** throughout that entire region, but having **completed a significant phase** of the ministry God had given him, he then anticipated being able to visit Rome at long last, as we see in **verses 22-24**—

**22 For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you;**

**23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you**

**24 whenever I go to Spain—for I hope, passing through, to see you, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while.**

**In God's providence**, He answered Paul's prayers and fulfilled his desire to visit Rome in a **very unexpected manner**.

**Acts 21** records that shortly after Paul wrote the letter of Romans, **he visited Jerusalem to deliver the gift** he had collected on behalf of the Gentile churches for the Christians in Jerusalem.

**There he was arrested** in the temple which led to his **imprisonment in Caesarea**, as we read in **Acts 23**, for over two years.<sup>12</sup>

**Turn** with me quickly to **Acts 24**—as Luke records, Paul experienced the **corruption of the Roman judicial system**.

Though Paul's innocence was evident, Luke tells us that the **Roman governor Felix** chose to keep him imprisoned.

**Look** at **Acts 24:26-27** as we read the **all-too-familiar story of a corrupt official** trying to solicit bribes and then acting to gain political favour instead of administering justice—

<sup>26</sup> **At the same time, he was also hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to summon for him quite often and converse with him.**

<sup>27</sup> **But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favour, Felix left Paul imprisoned.**

After Paul experienced **further mistreatment** under the next governor, **Festus**, he decided to use the **privileges of Roman citizenship** that he held.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1977), 475. See also, Tremper Longman III, Peter Enns, and Mark Strauss, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 1280.

Flip to **Acts 25:7-12** as we read the account—

**7 And after Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove,**

**8 while Paul said in his own defence, “I have committed no sin either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.”**

**9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favour, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and to be tried before me on these matters?”**

**10 But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.**

**11 If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.”**

**12 Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, “You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.”**

That began Paul’s arduous journey to Jerusalem that, according to Acts 27, included a dangerous journey at sea that resulted in a shipwreck during a storm.

Eventually, though, Paul arrived in Rome. Turn to Acts 28 and follow along in Luke’s account in Acts 28:11-15—

**11 Now at the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead.**

**12 After we put into Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.**

**13 From there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and after a day when a south wind sprang up, on the second day we came to Puteoli.**

**14 There we found some brothers, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome.**

**15 And the brothers, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.**

**When Paul prayed in dependence upon God**, asking for God's help in his plan to minister the gospel in Rome, **that's how God answered his prayers.**

**Paul could hardly have imagined** such a dangerous and delayed journey to Rome when, as he says in **Romans 1:10**, he prayed, **“earnestly asking, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.”**

However, as Luke records in **Acts 28:15**, Paul **“thanked God and took courage”** when, at long last, he found his way to the faithful church in Rome.

Paul apparently **spent at least 2–3 years in Rome** under house arrest, but with great freedom to meet with the believers there **in order to teach and preach the gospel.**

**As we consider, then**, Paul's practice of prayer, especially as he prayed to ask God for **help in granting him opportunities** for the gospel, you and I need to **follow Paul's example of resting in God's providence.**

That means **expressing our dependence** on God through prayer, **submitting our plans and desires** for gospel ministry to Him, and also **trusting in God** when His providential answers are **very different from our expectations**.

## CONCLUSION

**As we conclude**, this section of Paul's letter focuses on his **anticipated ministry in Rome**.

We can gather everything Paul says in this section under **two headings**—Paul's practice of prayer, and Paul's plan to visit Rome.

**In part one of our study**, we gave attention to Paul's practice of prayer as he **thanked God for His gospel work** of calling to Himself people from among all the nations.

Studying Paul's practice of prayer revealed that his prayers were **characterised by at least two things**—giving thanks to God, and asking God for help.

**Paul gave us much to consider**, but there were **three main implications** that help us to apply this section to our own lives.

**First**, Paul's practice of thanksgiving in prayer implies that we should be **thanking God for the progress of the gospel**, as He effectually calls His people through the gospel and gathers them together into faithful, Bible-believing churches.

**Second**, Paul's view of serving God in the gospel as worship implies that we cannot limit our worship to the songs we sing in church, but we must also **worship God in the ministry of the gospel** as we all use our spiritual gift to fulfil the Great Commission.

**Third**, Paul's practice of expressing dependence in prayer implies that we should **submit our plans and desires for gospel ministry to God**, and that we should **trust God** when His providential answers are very different from our expectations.

**Next week, Lord-willing**, we'll continue with **part two** and Paul's plan to visit Rome.

## BENEDICTION

Now the Saviour, who died and rose and who reigns,  
grant you joy in the midst of labor,  
peace in the midst of troubles,  
hope in the midst of despair,  
and faithfulness in the midst of temptation.  
Amen.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 23.

1:8  
b  
c  
d  
1:9  
b  
c  
d  
e  
f  
1:10  
b  
c  
1:11  
b  
c  
1:12  
b  
c  
d  
1:13  
b  
c  
d  
e  
1:14  
b  
1:15  
b

First, I thank my God  
 through Jesus Christ  
 for you all,  
 because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.  
 For God, [...] is my witness  
 whom I serve  
 in my spirit  
 in the gospel of His Son,  
 as to how without ceasing  
 I make mention of you,  
 always in my prayers  
 earnestly asking,  
 if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.  
 For I long to see you  
 so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you,  
 that you may be strengthened;  
 that is, to be mutually encouraged,  
 while among you,  
 by each other's faith,  
 both yours and mine.  
 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,  
 that often I have planned to come to you  
 (and have been prevented so far)  
 so that I may have some fruit among you also,  
 even as among the rest of the Gentiles.  
 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,  
 both to the wise and to the foolish.  
 In this way, for my part,  
 I am eager to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Main clause  
 Means of 8a  
 Reason for 8a  
 Reason for 8c  
 Explains 8a-d  
 Describes 9a  
 Instrument of 9b  
 Sphere of 9b  
 Manner of 9f  
 Content of 9a  
 Time of 9f  
 Manner of 9f  
 Content of 10b  
 Reason for 10c  
 Purpose of 11a  
 Purpose of 11b  
 Explains 11c  
 Time of 12a  
 Instrument of 12a  
 Restatement of 12c  
 Qualifies 11-12  
 Content of 13a  
 Contrast to 13b  
 Purpose of 13b  
 Comparison to 13d  
 Explains 13e  
 Restates 14a  
 Manner of 15b  
 Inference of 14a-b