

## PAUL'S MINISTRY IN ROME, PART II ROMANS 1:8–15

### INTRODUCTION

**As a Pharisee**, Paul knew a lot about the Old Testament scriptures, **and as an apostle** he knew a lot about the gospel, but Paul was far from a socially-ignorant recluse, or loner, because **he knew a lot about relationships too**.

In fact, **relationships mattered** a great deal to the apostle Paul.

In the **first seven verses**, Paul focused on his **relationship with God** through Jesus Christ, which was fitting for his formal introduction of his apostolic ministry and gospel message.

**In the next section**, as he introduces **his anticipated ministry in Rome**, he now focuses on his **relationships with the Roman Christians**.

Though, of course, we know that Paul did not plant the church in room and therefore he was not personally acquainted with most of the believers there, we've also established that Paul had **relationships with at least some of the members** in Rome.

If you scan over **Paul's personal greetings** in **chapter 16**, you'll see a list of believers that Paul considered to be **dear friends and fellow brothers and sisters** in Christ.

While Paul had **established relationships** with some members of the church in Rome, he regularly and frequently prayed—as we learnt last Sunday—that God would **providentially help him to visit Rome** and **establish relationships** with the whole church.

**In part one** of our study of **verses 8–15**, we examined the details of **verses 8–10** in which Paul described his **practice of prayer**.

His prayers were characterised by **giving thanks to God** and **asking for God's help** in gospel ministry.

Paul assures the Christians in Rome that as often as he prayed for them, his prayers were **characterised** by giving thanks to God for their faith in Christ and asking for God's providential help to visit them, as he had frequently desired to.

**Now today**, as we examine the details of **verses 11–15**, we will find Paul **describing his plan to visit Rome**.

Though he will explain in greater detail, it's clear that the heart of Paul's **motivation is relationships**.

Paul understood God's plan for relationships between believers as part of the **transforming power of the gospel** in the lives of God's people.

As God transforms us as individuals through the gospel, He helps us to understand the **purpose and value of being part of a community**.

That community is the **universal body of Christ**, represented in **local churches**, and the gospel transforms our **selfish individualism** into a love for one another as fellow believers in Christ.

To say that another way, the **gospel transforms our relationships** so that we value one another more highly than ourselves.

Paul had that understanding of God's plan, and we can see how much he **valued relationships with other Christians** in this section describing his plan to visit the Christians in Rome.

**Paul's love for the church** in Rome is evident in the words of **verse 11**, "**For I long to see you....**"

That longing, that eager desire to be with them, **is explained, firstly**, by Paul's prayers in which he regularly and frequently prayed for the Roman Christians with thankfulness, but it is explained, **secondly**, by Paul's purpose for wanting to visit.

**That purpose centred on relationships** because, for Paul, relationships are **the context and the object of the service** that Paul offers to God in worship.

**In verse 9**, Paul inserted an **important statement** about his gospel ministry when he wrote that he served God in his spirit in the gospel of His Son.

As we learnt in part one of our study, Paul means that his ministry in the gospel was **wholehearted and sincere worship** to God.

Paul viewed our service to God as worship of God, as **Romans 12:1** refers to it as, “**your spiritual service of worship.**”

As we continue in part two of our study today, Paul will clarify that this service is **service to God**, but **specifically service of God's people.**

**Vertically this service**, or a gospel ministry as he also calls it, is **worship** of God, **but horizontally** it is **love** for one another.

It is gospel ministry because it aims to fulfil the Great Commission by **making and maturing disciples** of Christ.

But as Paul applies that to his service of the church in Rome, it is clear that the **context of this service** is the local church and the **object of the service** is the people of God—the members of the church.

So as I said, relationships are the **context and the object** of the service that Paul offers to God in worship.

**Now**, there is **another word** that the New Testament uses to refer to loving acts of service within the context of relationships between believers in Christ—that is called “**fellowship.**”

In our previous sermon series through **1 Peter**, **we defined “fellowship”** as follows—

*Fellowship is the community life of a local church as believers exercise faith and love towards Christ and one another.*

That definition helpfully reminds us that fellowship between believers, among one another within the church, is based on a **common fellowship with Christ**.

Because we are united to Christ by faith, we are thereby also united to one another.

We see this stated clearly in **1 John 1:3**—

**What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

As the apostle John states, believers have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and **that fellowship is the foundation** for the fellowship the believers have with one another.

As **John MacArthur** comments—

*“Anybody in fellowship with Jesus Christ is also in fellowship with anybody else in fellowship with Jesus Christ. This is our common ground. It is not social, economic, intellectual, cosmetic, or anything else superficial. Our common ground is that which is pulsing through the life of every Christian—the heartbeat of God. Our common ground is that we possess a common eternal life and are children in the same family.”<sup>1</sup>*

**So then**, to use the alternate language of relationships, believers have a relationship with the Father and the Son, and **that relationship is the foundation** for the relationships between believers, and the **foundation for the loving acts of service** that they practice with one another.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *The Church: The Body of Christ*, edited and outlined by David Sper (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1981), 51.

**So as Paul exemplifies** with the believers in Rome, relationships are the **context and the object** of the service that believers offer to God in worship.

This is wonderfully expressed in the **Westminster Confession of Faith**, which states—

*“...being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.”<sup>2</sup>*

The Westminster Confession is elaborating on New Testament commands such as **1 Peter 4:10**, which we studied last year—

**As each one has received a gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God**

**Now**, for Paul who viewed such service as **both worship to God and gospel ministry** to his people—according to **Romans 1:9**—what makes it worshipful is the **intention of glorifying God**, and what makes it gospel ministry is the **intention of adding to the body, and building up the body** of the local church.

Paul describes those **horizontal acts of loving service** to one another as the **healthy fellowship**, or community life of a local church, in **Ephesians 4:16**—

**...the whole body, being joined and held together by what every joint supplies** [that is, every believer’s faithful use of their spiritual gift], **according to the properly measured working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.**

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<sup>2</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 26.1.

So as we'll see today, the apostle **Paul valued relationships** with his fellow believers in Christ, because he **valued the fellowship of the church**.

As I said earlier, Paul's purpose in wanting to visit Rome **centred on relationships** because relationships are the **context and the object** of the service that he offered to God in worship.

To put that in different words, Paul's purpose in visiting Rome centred on the **fellowship that he aimed to enjoy** with the church in Rome because that was the context of the **service that he offered to God in worship**—that was his anticipated gospel ministry.

**In short, Paul valued the fellowship of the church.**

As we study part two of Paul's ministry in Rome and focus on **his plan to visit Rome**, I trust that you too will come to **value the fellowship** of the church just as Paul did.

As **J. I. Packer** put it, "*As we value the health of our own souls and of the Christian church, then, we must learn to prize fellowship.*"<sup>3</sup>

So with that introduction, let's look at **the details of Paul's plan to visit Rome**.

As Paul explains his plan, he gives **two reasons** for his anticipated ministry in Rome—**fellowship (11–12) and fruit (13–15)**.

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<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 200.

## 2. PAUL'S PLAN TO VISIT ROME (11–15)

As we've established, we can **divide the larger section of verses 8–15** into two headings—Paul's practice of prayer, from **verses 8–10**, and Paul's plan to visit Rome, from **verses 11–15**.

In part one of our study, we examined Paul's practice of prayer.

That brings us today to part two and Paul's plan to visit Rome.

Before we look at the details of **verses 11–15**, it's worth taking a moment to consider the **relationship between Paul's prayers and Paul's plans**.

We learnt last Sunday that Paul's prayers were characterised by giving thanks to God and asking God for help, especially the **help he needed in gospel ministry**, such as God's **providential opening of opportunities** to proclaim the gospel.

Paul needed God's help to sovereignly order his circumstances so that he would be able to fulfil his apostolic commission to preach the gospel "**for the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of His name**," as he wrote in **verse 5**.

Even as an apostle, called by God and commissioned by Christ, Paul was **completely dependent upon God in his ministry**, and knew that his opportunities to proclaim the gospel were **ordained by God**—even when those opportunities were different from his expectations.

What we need to be clear on though, is that Paul's **prayers did not mean** that Paul had no responsibility to **plan**.

Paul's prayers for God's help **did not negate his planning**, but rather they were the reason he could **plan and prepare optimistically**.

As we read last week, **Proverbs 16:9** reminds us to be dependent upon God in our planning—

**The heart of man plans his way, but Yahweh directs his steps.**

But Solomon never meant that we should not plan, only that we should **hold our plans loosely and submit them to God** as we trust Him to either fulfil them or change them as He orders our circumstances.

That's exactly how Paul planned for ministry—he prayed to God in **dependence and submission**, and then he **prepared optimistically for the anticipated opportunities**.

His plans, then, **are not unrelated to his prayers**, but are the **result of his confidence** that God would answer his prayers.

We see that here is **Paul plans optimistically** for his anticipated ministry in Rome, even though he held his plans loosely and God provided him with the opportunity in a very different way than he had expected.

Now let's look at **the first reason** that Paul planned to visit Rome—**he wanted to enjoy fellowship** with the believers there and was confident that the fellowship would be mutually beneficial.

That's what he means when he writes in **verses 11–12**—

## a. Fellowship (11–12)

<sup>11</sup> **For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be strengthened;**  
<sup>12</sup> **that is, to be mutually encouraged, while among you, by each other's faith, both yours and mine.**

As Paul begins **verse 11**, his frequent prayers of **verses 9–10 are further explained** by his **love for the church in Rome**, as he says, **“For I long to see you....”**

Paul wanted to visit the Roman believers in order **to serve them in love** as they **enjoyed fellowship** with one another.

As **MacArthur** comments, *“He did not want to go as a tourist to see the famous Appian Way or the Forum or the Coliseum or the chariot races. He wanted to go to Rome to give of himself, not to entertain or indulge himself.”*<sup>4</sup>

The word translated as **“long for”** is an **emphatic word** that elsewhere in **biblical Greek** refers to the longing of a nursing infant for its mother's milk, as we see in **1 Peter 2:2**,  
**like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word.**<sup>5</sup>

Paul uses it frequently describe his **love for his fellow believers** and his **desire to be with them**, as he says in **Philippians 1:8**—

**God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

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<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 76.

But Paul **further clarifies** why he has such a strong desire to be with the church in Rome.

He writes, “**so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you.**” **Now**, the exact nature of the “**spiritual gift**” that Paul has in mind here has been **vigorously debated among scholars**.

However, there's really **no need for confusion** because Paul **clearly defines the gift** in the following context.

Sometimes commentators are **too clever for their own good**, and they take a relatively simple matter and turn into something more complicated than what it has to be.

So let's **work through this systematically** and you'll see that what Paul means by “**spiritual gift**” is **both simple and clear**.

**To begin with**, the Greek word Paul uses for gift (**χάρισμα**) can refer to what **one commentator** described as, “*a special gift... bestowed on a member of the Church by God in order that it may be used by that member in [the service of God] and in the service of men.*”<sup>6</sup>

**That's the sense** in which Paul uses it in **Romans 12:6-8**—

**6 but having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: whether prophecy, in agreement with the faith;**

**7 or service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;**

**8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with generosity; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.**

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<sup>6</sup> 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), 79.

That is perhaps what **many of us assume** Paul is referring to in **Romans 1:11**, and given the context of what Paul has said about the spiritual service of worship, **it would certainly make sense.**

However, the can also carry a **more general sense** in which it refers to, *“a blessing or benefit to be bestowed on the Christians in Rome by God through Paul’s presence.”*<sup>7</sup>

**Now**, there is **no reason to think** that Paul has special gifts in mind here, and the indefinite form of the gift that he describes as **“some spiritual gift”** means that its far more like that he has the **general concept of a spiritual gift in mind.**

So Paul is using the word here in the **more general sense of anything that builds up the spiritual life.**<sup>8</sup>

In fact, that's exactly what Paul himself **clarifies is the purpose** of the spiritual gift when he writes at the **end of verse 11**, **“that you may be strengthened.”**

The word **“strengthened”** here has the idea of **making something strong or firm, or setting firmly in place.**

It's used of making people stronger in the sense of being more **firm and unchanging in their attitude or beliefs.**<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, 79.

<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), 60.

<sup>9</sup> Louw & Nida, στηρίζω.

Paul uses it clearly in that sense in **1 Thessalonians 3:2**—

**We sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith.**

So Paul hoped that by his visit, the Roman Christians might be **strengthened in their faith to stand firm and immovable as a result of the gift** God would give them through his ministry.<sup>10</sup>

**Now**, while that already makes the meaning of “**spiritual gift**” in **verse 11** pretty clear, Paul provides **further clarification** in **verse 12**.

Paul intends that the “**spiritual gift**” will not only benefit the believers in Rome, but that **he too will receive some benefit** as he writes, “**that is, to be mutually encouraged, while among you....**”

In **verse 12**, Paul offers what **one author** called, “*an explanatory correction.*”<sup>11</sup>

In other words, he **did not want to be misunderstood** by what he had said in **verse 11**, which might otherwise sound **boastful or patronising**.

Simply put, Paul acknowledged that the strengthening will be **a two-way street**—he anticipated receiving as much benefit from his visit as what he was able to impart.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *LSB Translation Notes*, <https://tyndale.tms.edu/>. See also, Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ro 1:12.

In fact, we are now able to **look back at verse 11** and take note of the fact that the word “**impart**” can **also be translated as, “share.”**

In other words, Paul longed to see the Roman believers, “**so that I may [share] some spiritual gift [with] you**” which further **reinforces the idea of mutual benefit** that Paul is communicating.

**John Calvin** comments on Paul’s “*explanatory correction*” of **verse 12** by writing—

*“Note how modestly he expresses what he feels by not refusing to seek strengthening from inexperienced beginners. He means what he says, too, for there is none so void of gifts in the Church of Christ who cannot in some measure contribute to our spiritual progress. Ill will and pride, however, prevent our deriving such benefit from one another”<sup>12</sup>*

In **verse 12**, Paul describes the mutual strengthening as a mutual “**encouragement.**”

The word refers to **comfort or encouragement.**

Paul uses the **same concept** in **1 Thessalonians 3:6-8** to describe the comfort he received from the believers in Thessalonica—

**<sup>6</sup> Now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always remember us kindly, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,**

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<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, cited in MacArthur, *Romans*, 43–44. Cf. John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, ed. Timothy George, Theological Foundations (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2022), 20.

7 **for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we were *comforted* about you through your faith;**  
8 **for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.**

What is different in the way Paul uses it in **Romans 1:12** is that though Paul knew of the faith of these Roman Christians, as he said in **verse 8**, he **could not experience** the mutual encouragement of this gift without being, as **verse 12** states, “**among you**”—that is, **in their presence**.

That is because it was **not simply the existence of their faith** that he believed would be encouraging, but their **faith put into practice** through loving service as they enjoyed fellowship with one another.

As **Doug Moo** writes, “*the faith they share brings with it different perspectives and gifts, which, when shared, bring mutual edification.*”<sup>13</sup>

We can now **see with clarity the simple meaning** of Paul’s “**spiritual gift**” that he hoped to share with the church in Rome.

In its simplest form, **it was a blessing or a benefit** that would be experienced when Paul and his fellow believers were with one another.

He then clarified that the purpose of this benefit would be their strengthened faith, but he further clarifies that he would also be strengthened in what he called a mutual encouragement.

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<sup>13</sup> 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), 63.

**Finally**, as we see here in **verse 12**, the **instrument of this encouragement**, which is also the instrument of the spiritual gift, was “**each other’s faith**”—both the Roman believers and Paul’s.

That provides the **final clarification** that they would all experience the strengthening of their faith and encouragement of their hearts as they put their faith into practice by **lovingly serving one another in what we call “fellowship.”**

As we can now say with confidence, **Paul valued the fellowship of believers in the local church.**

He highly prized it because **relationships are the context and the object** of the service that Paul offered to God in worship.

**For you and I**, that means that when we put our faith into practice by serving one another in love, the **vertical result** is that God is worshipped, and the **horizontal result** is that we build each other up through fellowship.

So the object of your gospel ministry must include your fellow believers in the local church, and as you use your spiritual gift to serve these believers you are offering worship to God.

**Simply put**, the **object** of your service is your fellow Christian and the **context** of your service is the fellowship of the local church.

**Without this service, without this fellowship, your worship of God is deficient.**

Building up the body of Christ by serving your fellow believers is one of the **primary ways** in which you fulfil the Great Commission, as God uses this fellowship to mature disciples of Christ.

It is this maturing of believers, and being matured by believers, that Paul viewed as the **spiritual gift he anticipated** through the fellowship he planned to enjoy with the church in Rome.

**Paul reinforces and clarifies** this idea further through the **second reason** for his anticipated ministry in Rome—not just **fellowship (11–12)** but also **fruit (13–15)**.

### **b. Fruit (13–15)**

Now as Paul continues, he wants the Romans to know that **not only** did he frequently pray for an opportunity to visit them, **and not only** did he have a sincere desire to see them because of his love for them, but many times he had also **made specific plans to visit Rome**.

Look at **verse 13**—**I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far)....**

In fact, we have a record of at least **one occasion** that Paul planned a visit.

Luke records that after **at least two years of productive ministry** in Ephesus, there was such effective ministry that even those who had formerly practiced witchcraft were burning their occult materials in a sign of repentance and faith in Christ.

Then, as Luke says in **Acts 19:21**—

**Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”**

When Paul writes in **Romans 1:13** that he had been prevented from visiting Rome, we should not imagine some **demonic opposition or act of spiritual warfare** that frustrated his plans.

Rather, as we noted last week, it was **primarily Paul's busyness in ministry.**

He had frequently found either **unanticipated trouble** in the churches or **unexpected measures of success** in proclaiming the gospel, such as the two years he spent in Ephesus of which Luke writes in **Acts 19:10** that, **“all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”**

**The pressing needs and demands** of his apostolic ministry of the gospel is what Paul meant when he said that he had been prevented from visiting Rome.

He says as much in **Romans 15:19** where he states that, **from Jerusalem and all around as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.**

**Those two points**—Jerusalem and Illyricum—described the **far-reaching extent** of Paul's ministry in the eastern Mediterranean.

With such a vast and demanding gospel ministry, Paul goes on in **Romans 15:22** to say, “**For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you.**”

Now, however, as Paul wrote his letter he anticipated that, **at long last**, he would be free and God would provide him an opportunity to minister to the church in Rome.

After all, he had **completed a significant phase** of the ministry God had given him, which is what he meant in **Romans 15:19** that he had, “**fully preached the gospel of Christ.**”

So with that phase of his ministry complete, he ought to be **able to fulfil his desire and prayerfully anticipate** the success of his plan to travel to Rome.

After making that **parenthetical statement**, Paul continues in **Romans 1:14** to provide another reason for his visit to Rome—  
**so that I may have some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.**

**In truth**, as we'll come to see, **Paul really only has one reason** which he then restates in different ways.

So the restatement of his **first reason—fellowship**—is the **second reason—fruit**.

Paul aimed for the **fruit of successful gospel ministry in Rome**.

We cannot consider Paul's words here apart from the earlier statement of his **apostolic commission** in **verse 5**, that Christ had given him the office and task of an apostle,

**for the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles....**

There Paul stated that **the scope of his ministry** was all the Gentiles—every tribe, tongue, people, and nation—so that through the gospel, **God would effectually call** His eternally loved and chosen people to repentance and faith in Christ.

He described the **response of God's people**, as produced by the power of God in the gospel (**Romans 1:16**), as “**the obedience of faith.**”

Very simply, that includes both the **initial response of faith** as an **act of obedience**, and the **continued response** of increasing obedience **produced by faith.**

In short, Paul aimed at both **making and maturing disciples** of Jesus Christ in fulfilment of the Great Commission and his apostolic task.

Paul viewed the **successful outcome of his ministry**, whether adding to the body through **evangelism**, or building up the body through **edification**, as a fruitful harvest for his labours.

He uses the same idea in **Philippians 1:22**—

**If I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me....**

So when Paul writes that he wants to visit Rome in order to **“have some fruit,”** he means **both an increase in the number of Christians** through evangelisation **“among”** the Romans **and a strengthening of the faith** of the existing Roman Christians themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Paul’s purpose of a fruitful harvest for the gospel was **not limited to the Romans**, however, as he clarifies that he aimed for fruit, **“even as among the rest of the Gentiles.”**

**As an apostle to the gentiles**, Rome fell within the scope of Paul’s ministry, but Paul also hoped through the support of the church in Rome to have fruit from **regions even further West**.

So Paul was aiming to harvest the fruit of successful gospel ministry **both in Rome and beyond**, to places like **Spain** as he said in **Romans 15:23-24**—

<sup>23</sup> **...I have had for many years a longing to come to you**

<sup>24</sup> **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.**

Paul places his anticipated ministry in Rome and his plans to visit there **within the context of his broader apostolic ministry**, which is what he is referring to in **Romans 1:14**—

**I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.**

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 64.

Here Paul speaks of his “**obligation**,” or more literally, his “**debt**” that he owes to the gentiles.

Paul uses **two pairs of contrasting descriptions** to essentially say that he aims to **serve all gentiles with the gospel**, regardless of any way they may be **socially divided**.

In other words, his plan to have a harvest among the Roman Christians and beyond is **not about personal accomplishment or pride**, but his profound sense of missionary “**obligation**.”

Paul aimed to **fulfil his calling** as one, “**set apart for the gospel of God**,” according to **verse 1**.

Paul had received “**grace and apostleship**” for this very purpose, according to **verse 5**.

In **Ephesians 3:8** he elaborates on the responsibility he had to preach the gospel of Christ **because of the grace gift he had been given**—

**To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ**

Elsewhere, in **1 Corinthians 9:16**, he stated the same missionary “**obligation**” in a manner that demonstrated his motivation in his ministry of the gospel—

**If I proclaim the gospel, I have nothing to boast, for I am under compulsion. For woe is me if I do not proclaim the gospel.**

Now in **Romans 1:14**, Paul uses **two pairs of contrasting descriptions** to further emphasis that he aimed to serve “**all the gentiles**” with the gospel—

**I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.**

Commentators are divided as to the exact contrasts that Paul is making here, **even though his point is clear**—he makes **no distinction within the scope** of his ministry.

He has an **indiscriminate aim** to preach Christ to all the gentiles.

In the **first contrasting pair**, Paul refers to “**barbarians.**”

This term was used to mock the way “**uncultured**” foreign **languages sounded to Greek speakers.**

The term was widely used to refer to **all non-Greek-speaking peoples**, especially to imply the **supposedly inferior culture** of such peoples.

By contrast, then, the “**Greeks**” Paul referred to were the supposedly **cultured or civilised Greek-speaking gentiles.**

Paul then intended to use this first pair to refer to **all of gentile humanity**, divided according to either **linguistic or cultural criteria.**<sup>15</sup>

Of course, many of the **Roman Christians** would have considered themselves to be **part of the first category.**

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 65.

However, we also know that the gospel was particularly appealing to the **lower classes such as slaves and foreigners** who lives in Rome.

Perhaps those were the “**barbarians**” Paul had in mind, or maybe it was those **further west such as the Spaniards**.

At the end of the day, **it makes little difference** because Paul wasn’t trying to place certain people into these categories, only to use the contrast to describe the **all-encompassing scope of his labours** for Christ and the gospel.

The same is true of the **second contrast** where the pair is the “**wise**” and the “**foolish**.”

Paul seems to use this pair to divide the gentiles into those who were **intelligent and educated**, on the one hand, and those who lacked intelligence and education, on the other.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps Paul had **something similar in mind** to what he wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:26-27**—

<sup>26</sup> **Consider your calling, brothers, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.**

<sup>27</sup> **But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.**

Once again, the exact nature of the contrast is not important, but **rather the point that Paul is making**.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, 84.

He intends to visit Rome because of an **obligation he has to all gentile humanity**.

So Paul's plan to visit Rome was **motivated by his duty before God** as an apostle and as a minister of the gospel.

After stating this point, Paul applies the general principle of his duty **to the church in Rome**, as he says in **verse 15**—

**In this way, for my part, I am eager to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.**

Paul's obligation or duty is expressed in his **heartfelt eagerness** to "**proclaim the gospel**" in Rome.

As we'll see in a moment, this is a **restatement of his earlier "longing"** to share in the gift of edification and encouragement through fellowship with the believers in Rome.

**While it may sound strange**, at first, for Paul to speak of proclaiming the gospel to believers, we've already established that the gospel produces the fruit of **both the initial response** of faith as an act of obedience, **and the continued response** of increasing obedience produced by faith.

Therefore, in writing to the church in Rome about his reason for visiting, he **aimed for fruit by proclaiming the gospel**.

This, then, **refers primarily** to the **ongoing work of teaching and discipleship** that builds up the body of believers after their conversion.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 66.

So with the church of Rome specifically, Paul's aim was not primarily the making of disciples through evangelism, but the **maturing of disciples** through the **preaching and teaching ministry** of the gospel.

Of course, **that's not to say** that Paul did not want to evangelise and add new members to the body of the church in Rome, **only that his primary purpose** in visiting was to build up the body through as they matured in the gospel.

The proclaiming of the gospel was **Paul's loving service of his fellow believers** through the **use of his spiritual gift of preaching and teaching.**

This is **how he would benefit the believers in Rome**, even as he expected to be benefited by their loving service in return.

So then, as we can see clearly now, **Paul provides two reasons** for his plan to visit the church in Rome—**fellowship and fruit.**

However, the second reason is **really just a restatement of the first** when the fruit Paul aimed for would be **produced by means of their fellowship.**

Very simply, **that is why relationships mattered to Paul.**

**That is why Paul valued the fellowship of the local church.**

## CONCLUSION

**As we conclude**, it's clear that as much as relationships mattered to Paul, **they ought to matter to you and me.**

That's because relationships are the **context and the object of your service** that you offer to God in worship.

That means that your service is **primarily focussed on the local church**, the community of believers, as the context for your gospel ministry.

As you and your fellow believers in Christ lovingly serve one another, that **fellowship will produce the fruit** of building up the body as believers are strengthened and encouraged in their faith.

As with Paul and the Christians in Rome, **God's design is for fellowship to be mutually beneficial** as every member uses their gift to **worship God and serve one another in love.**

That's why you should long to gather with the church every week—just like Paul longed to be with the believers in Rome—  
because **relationships matter**;  
because the **fellowship** of the local church is immeasurably **valuable** in **producing the gospel fruit of your maturity.**

## BENEDICTION

*Now the God, who hears your cries and listens to your prayers,  
be the shelter above you,  
the tower around you,  
the rock beneath you  
this day and all the days until Jesus comes.  
Amen.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 24.

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