

Paul's Travel Plans

[Romans 1:8-15](#)



We are looking at Paul's introduction to the book of Romans which covers verse 1 thru 17. This is the longest introduction of Paul's. This introduction divides into three parts: [1-7](#) is the salutation, which we have looked at for the last three weeks. Today we will look at verses [8-15](#) which is about Paul's travel plans, and next week we will look at verse [16-17](#), the gospel unveils God's righteousness.

Paul had never met the Christians to whom he wrote, so in verses [8-15](#) he spends some time sharing his heart with them. Paul had *never been to Rome* when he wrote this letter. That's atypical for Paul, because he usually visited a city like Thessalonica or Corinth, then left to continue his travels, and later wrote a letter back to the believers in that city. But that's not what Paul is doing here. Since he had never been to Rome, he felt a special obligation to introduce himself to the Roman believers. It was necessary for him to pave the way for this epistle by expanding on his relationship to his readers. He had a deep and abiding concern and interest in the spiritual well-being of these Romans.

This section, [Romans 1:8-15](#), may be Paul's answer to an unspoken question. Why had the Paul never visited the largest and most significant Gentile city of the time, the city of Rome? They would have been puzzled by that because they had heard that Paul claimed to be the "*Apostle of the Gentiles*." Well, if Paul is the Apostle of the Gentiles, why hasn't he visited the most significant Gentile city in the whole of the Roman Empire? Paul answers that question in this section.

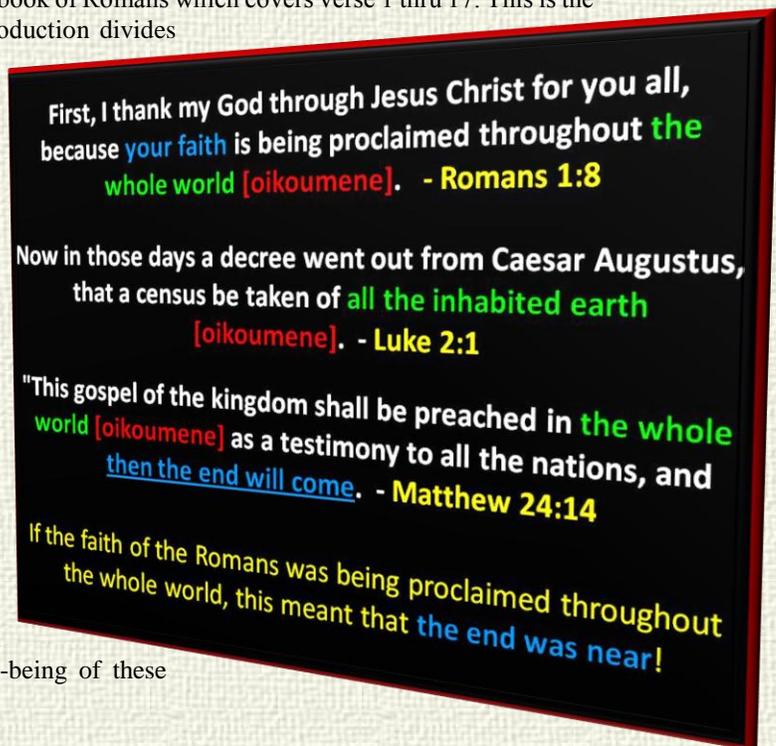
First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. Romans 1:8 NASB

He uses "*first*" to express "of first order" or "let me begin by stating." The first thing I want you to know is that I thank God for you. In each of his epistles, except Galatians, Paul begins with an expression of gratitude for his recipients.

Now remember at the time of this writing, Paul had never been to Rome, but he knew some folks there. He gives a list of them in chapter 16. He says, "*Send my greetings to them.*" Priscilla and Aquila were two of them. Evidently they had told him about the faith of these believers in the midst of one of the most perverse cultures the world has ever known.

Paul doesn't thank the Roman Christians for their faith. If it originated in them and their good desires and their abilities, then they should get the thanks. But that's not the case. They had been called as saints by the Lord God through the gospel. So Paul thanks God for their faith because God is the one who gave the faith, and he should get all the glory and all the thanks. Thanksgiving is an acknowledgment of a benefit. When a person thanks God for the faith of individuals, he is acknowledging that that faith is a gift of God. So the very fact that he says, "*I thank my God for your faith*" is an evidence of the fact that he believed that faith was a gift of God.

Paul doesn't specially say here that faith is a gift of God, but he clearly implies it.



But in other places in the Scripture Paul does say that faith comes from God.

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, Philippians 1:29 NASB

"It has been granted"—is the Greek verb *charizomai*, which comes from *charis*, which means grace. Paul compares suffering with salvation and says that both are grace gifts. God gives suffering as graciously and lovingly as He gives you the faith to believe in His Son.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB

Faith is the gift of God. Now it is true that we exercise faith, but we exercise faith because God has already wrought in us so that our faith is the product of a sovereign God. So Paul thanks God for the faith of the Romans.

Paul says, *"I thank my God through Jesus Christ"*—he gives thanks as an emissary of Jesus the Messiah, insinuating his apostolic authority. As an apostle to the Gentiles Paul voices thanks that the gospel was bearing fruit among them.

Notice what Paul says about their faith, *"Your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."* Did everyone on the planet hear about the faith of the Roman Christians? At this point, the gospel had not gone to China or to all points in Africa. It had certainly not come to North and South America. The phrase *"the whole world"* is probably used to entail the breadth of the Roman Empire.

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. Luke 2:1 NASB

The Romans were accustomed to speaking of their empire as *"the whole world."*

We know that Paul traveled through Asia Minor, Greece, and Crete; that he was in Italy, and probably in Spain and Gaul ([Romans 15:24-28](#)). During this time the other apostles weren't sitting around idle; and there is much proof that within thirty years after Pentecost churches were established in all these regions.

If the faith of the Romans was being proclaimed throughout *"the whole world"* this meant that the end was near:

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14 NASB

What **end** is he talking about here? Unless we take this verse totally out of its setting, *"the end"* in view here is the end or destruction which was to come upon Jerusalem and the temple ending the Jewish age. Was the gospel preached in *"all the world"* [before the temple was destroyed in AD 70](#)?

Probably one of the most common beliefs among Christians is that once the gospel has been preached to *"all the world,"* Christ will return and the world will end. This is a theme verse of the [Christian Broadcasting Network](#). They are trying to fulfill this verse. Most believers would say that this verse has not yet been fulfilled and the gospel has not yet been preached to *"all the world."* How do we know if it has? Well, Jesus said the end would come once the gospel was preached to *"all the world."* And the end that is in view in this context, is **the end of Jerusalem and the end of the Old Covenant age**. Since [Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70](#), we can assume that the gospel was preached to *"all the world"* by then or we would have to believe that Jesus was mistaken. Which one can you live with? How can we find out if the gospel was preached in *"all the world"* before AD 70? We can go the Scriptures and see what they tell us:

We have already seen that Paul said the faith of the Romans was proclaimed *"throughout the whole world"*. Their faith was the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus spoke of. At the end of Romans Paul said that the gospel has been made known to all nations.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is

manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; Romans 16:25-26 NASB

Paul taught this same idea when he wrote to the Colossians:

because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; Colossians 1:5-6 NASB

Then he goes on in verse 23 to say:

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. Colossians 1:23 NASB

In [Matthew 24:14](#), the Greek word for preached is *kerusso*; it is in the future tense. But in Colossians 1:23 the same word *kerusso* is in the aorist tense (past). Jesus said that it is to be preached and Paul says in **A.D. 62**, that it has been preached to every creature.

The testimony of the Romans Christians was strong. In fact, the testimony of the church in Rome was so strong that in 49 A.D., Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews, kicked them all out. The believers had stirred up the Jewish community by proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ.

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. Romans 1:9-10 NASB

The word “serve” here is the verb *latreuo* which when it has God as its object means “*worship*.” Paul says that he worships “*in the spirit*” which may be a contrast to the temple worship that was geographical and physical.

Paul makes the same contrast in Philippians 3:3.

for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, Philippians 3:3 NASB

The best texts have, “*Worship by the Spirit of God.*” In other words, it’s not outward ceremony but inward faith. It is produced by the Holy Spirit.

Paul had never been to Rome but he was deeply concerned for the Christians there and he unceasingly prayed for them. The Greek word translated “*unceasingly*” (*adialeiptos*) denotes that not much time elapsed between his prayers for them. It is the same word he uses in:

pray without ceasing; 1 Thessalonians 5:17 NASB

Paul is calling God to witness because he is referring to something that only God can see, namely something “in Paul’s spirit.”

Whenever I read about Paul’s prayer life I am always amazed. We know from his writings that he was absolutely committed to the sovereignty of God, to the extent that God controls who lands on Park Place, and yet he is also committed to prayer.

also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, Ephesians 1:11 NAS

In eternity past God predestined through the counsel of His will all that would take place in time. And then in time He works out all he has planned. God controls everything and yet Paul is committed to prayer.

Paul regularly labored in prayer. He prayed for the Ephesian Church, not ceasing to give thanks for them and “*making*

mention" of them in his prayers ([Eph. 1:16](#)). He thanked God for every remembrance of the Philippian Christians ([Phil. 1:3](#)) and prayed that their love might *"abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment"* (1:9). He said to the Thessalonian Church:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 1 Thessalonians 1:2 NASB

What was it that he prayed for the Romans? Was it, Lord, there's one of them that's got a painful bunion or a bad case of the flu? Or was it, Lord, one of them needs direction on which chariot they ought to buy? What do you think the content of his prayer was? Well, according to our text, he asked the Lord to send him to Rome so he could minister to them. If you want some insight into Paul's prayer life just look through his writings and you'll see what he prayed for.

If you look at the letter Paul wrote to the Ephesians which probably got circulated around a lot more places than the Ephesians. It was a letter to be sent to many churches. However, in 3:14 we have a typical prayer of Paul:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19 NASB

When is the last time you prayed like that? Look what he prayed for the Philippians:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; Philippians 1:9-10 NASB

And for the Colossians he prays:

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. Colossians 1:9-12 NASB

Second Thessalonians 1, same thing:

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 NASB

Did you notice that the content is all spiritual? He prayed for their heart to be knit with the heart of God. He prayed for their knowledge that they might know God's will and for their obedience that they might do it.

Paul not only prayed for others, he asked the Ephesians to pray for him. He was in prison when he wrote this prayer request. What would you ask prayer for if you were in prison? Notice what he asks prayer for:

and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6:19-20 NASB

Paul asks not for deliverance, or safety or relief from pain, **he asks for boldness!** This is the same thing we see from the Apostles when they had been threatened by the Jewish leadership:

"And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, Acts 4:29 NASB

Their prayers all seem to center around the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Is God's kingdom further advanced if you don't have a cold, or if you get a raise at work? So much of what we pray for is selfish. It's all about our comfort.

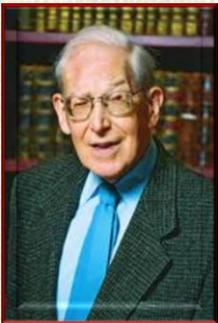
Paul was a man committed to prayer and he called us to a life of prayer also:

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; Colossians 4:2 NASB

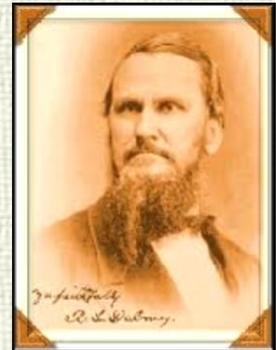
Did you ever notice how often prayer and thanksgiving are connected in Scripture? Paul tells the Colossian believers to **"Devote yourselves to prayer."** This word **"devote"** is the Greek word [proskartereo](#). It first meant: **"to be strong towards, to endure in, persevere in."** It came to mean: **"adhere to, persist in, to continue to do something with intense effort,"** with the possible implication of despite difficulty. The present tense of "devote" further emphasizes the idea of persistence of prayer. Paul's instructions, then, go beyond the simple idea of praying when circumstances are conducive to doing so and point towards a continuance.

It means you are to pray often and you pray regularly. Prayer is not to be infrequent, and prayer is not to be hit and miss. Being **"devoted to"** prayer means that you are not haphazard, and you are not forgetful. It means you take steps to see that it is part of your regular life, the same way eating and sleeping are.

Prayer is a discipline of life that requires our taking the time and energy to develop. I believe that it helps us to see that Jesus Christ was devoted to prayer in his earthly life. The gospel writers record that Jesus **"went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God"** ([Luke 6:12](#)). We also find our Lord rising in early morning, before day, to go to a solitary place for the purpose of prayer ([Mark 1:35](#)). If Jesus Christ needed to pray and found time in the busy demands of His life for prayer, how much more should we seek to be persistent in prayer? Martin Luther expressed it like this: **"As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray."**



Why is it that we don't pray more? Sometime we allow our theological convictions to become excuses for not praying. That is an unfortunate mistake. [J.I. Packer](#) explains that there is no conflict between God's sovereign foreordination and the effectiveness of prayer in the believer's life. **"God foreordains the means as well as the end, and our prayer is foreordained as the means whereby He brings His sovereign will to pass"** [Concise Theology, 189]. Along this same vein, [R.L. Dabney](#) has written: **"God does not command it because He needs to be informed of our wants, or to be made willing to help. He commands it because He has seen fit to ordain it as the appointed means for reception of His blessing"** [Systematic Theology, 717].



How many of you understand binary numbers and how they are used to make a computer work? How many of you use a computer? You mean to tell me that you use a computer even though you don't understand how it works?

How many of you understand how prayer can work when God is sovereign? How many of you pray? We can't change God's purposes, and if our prayers could shape God's policy, then the Most High would be subordinate to the will of man, and that is a terrifying thought. We know that we are commanded to pray, but because we don't understand how prayer can work when God is sovereign, we disobey His command to pray.

We don't have to know how a computer works to use it. **And we don't have to understand how prayer works to pray.** All we need to know is that God commands us to pray. How many of you have ever had an answer to prayer? Do you believe that God answers prayer? Sure you do. Since we believe that God answers prayer, why don't we pray more?

Another reason that we don't pray more is that we're busy people. We don't have time to pray. But are we busier than Jesus at the height of his ministry, ministering to thousands of people every single day? Yet He found time to pray. Jesus had the desire and need to pray, and He prayed a great deal, sometimes spending the entire night in prayer. How many entire nights have you spent in prayer? If Jesus needed to pray so much, doesn't that tell us that we need to pray even more?

always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. Romans 1:10 NASB

He boldly asked the Lord to send him to Rome and use him among those brethren. *“By the will of God”*—Paul’s will was to go to Rome but he waited upon God’s will; he was always submissive to the will of God. Now, at this point, Paul had no idea that God would send him to Rome under arrest of the Roman government! The Lord answered his prayer in an unusual way; yet he answered it so that Paul came to Rome, eventually, and ministered to these brethren.

Why did Paul want to go to Rome so bad? He had never seen the coliseum?

For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; Romans 1:11 NASB

The present tense of the verb suggests that Paul had a great longing that only intensified with the years. *“Long”* is from the Greek *epipotheo* which means: *“to intensely crave.”* He wanted to see the Roman believers "so that" or in order that he might *“impart some spiritual gift”* to them. *“Impart”* is more literally the idea of sharing with someone or giving with a view toward others.

“Spiritual gift”—is from *pneumatikos charisma*, a spiritual grace. I don’t think that Paul wanted to give them a spiritual gift in the sense of the gift of teaching or healing or helps. Those gifts came from God. Paul wanted to minister to them the gospel which proclaimed the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. This would dissolve their divisions and strengthen them to be a base of operations for his mission to Spain.

“That you may be established” is from *sterizo*, *to make you fast, to fix you, to confirm you, to strengthen you, to establish you*. Paul wanted to help them grow in spiritual things by teaching them the Word of God.

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:32 NASB

Paul tells the Ephesian elders that it is the Word of God that is *“able to build you up”*—the Bible is alive, and it has the power to address the deepest needs of your soul and change your life for the better. It has the power to save the sinner, sanctify the saint, and soothe the sufferer.

that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. Romans 1:12 NASB

“That is”—I don’t want you to misunderstand me. The encouraging will be mutual. Paul intends to encourage them but he hastens to say that he will also be encouraged by them.

I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. Romans 1:13 NASB

“I do not want you to be unaware”—always identifies something important that Paul proceeded to say. Paul’s desire was to come to them as he had often planned to do so. But he says I, *“have been prevented so far”*—this may be a reference to Satanic hindrance, because in [1 Thessalonians chapter 2](#), Paul refers to a hindrance in the ministry of the word given to him and there traces it to Satan.

For we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, more than once--and yet Satan hindered us. 1 Thessalonians 2:18 NASB

Some, however, think in the light of the fact that Paul does not mention Satan here, that the hindrance arises from other sources. But, since the expression is so similar, it may refer to the same thing. We cannot be absolutely sure though.

One obstacle that may have prevented Paul from reaching Rome previously was the imperial edict of A.D. 49 expelling all Jews from Rome ([Acts 18:2](#)). The passive voice of the verb *“have been prevented”*, suggests that whatever form it may have come, Paul received the hindrance as God’s providence.

As we know from our study of Acts, God did intend for Paul to visit Rome, but in a way which we would never have expected. He went to Rome with all expenses paid as a prisoner of the Roman Empire.

The fruit he hoped to obtain may refer to their growth and his evangelism among them, however, it may even refer to their support of his mission to Spain.

Why would Paul want to go to evangelize in Rome when there was already a church there? At the time of this writing there are probable less than two hundred believers in Rome, a city of about a million people. So there was much work to do in Rome. And these believers had not had the influence of an apostle.

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. Romans 1:14-15 NASB

Many say that Paul's obligation was to God because God had given him the grace of salvation. But when you receive grace from God, you don't become a debtor to God. Grace cannot and must not be paid back as a debt. Otherwise grace would no longer be grace. If I give you a gift and you try to pay me for it, you turn it into a purchase, not a gift. **So grace does not create debt in this sense.**

And Paul doesn't say that he is obligated to God but to the Greeks and barbarians. So why is he obligated to them? Verse 1 shows that Paul was *"called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,"* and verse 5 says that Paul *"received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles."* So when he says that he is a debtor to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, he is speaking about his obligation as the apostle of the Gentiles. It is his specific responsibility to preach the gospel to the Greeks and to the Barbarians because he is the apostle of the Gentiles. It's an obligation created by the command of the risen Christ. You are obligated to do what you are told to do by your Lord. In sharing his testimony before King Agrippa, Paul said that the Lord said to him:

'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; Acts 26:16 NASB

And Paul tells the Galatians that his calling is to Gentiles:

But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), Galatians 2:7-8 NASB

Paul had an obligation to preach to the Gentiles and he carried it out.

The terms *"Greek"* and *"Barbarian"* divide Gentiles by language and culture. In Paul's day this was a standard way of describing all races and classes within the Gentile world. The Greek people spoke of anyone who did not speak the Greek language as a barbarian. The Greek word *barbaros* is onomatopoeic and imitates any rough-sounding, unintelligible language.

The phrases here, *"Greeks and barbarians, wise and unwise"* are parallel phrases. The Greeks were considered the wise and the barbarians the unwise. And he's really saying the educated and the uneducated. The Greeks were very sophisticated and the Greek language was believed to be the language of the gods and the language of philosophy and wisdom and so forth.

So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. Romans 1:15 NASB

Paul is saying I realize my indebtedness and I'm ready and willing to pay it.

What about us, do we have an obligation to preach the gospel to the unsaved? We certainly are not under the same obligation as Paul was as the Apostle to the Gentiles, but do we have any obligation?

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? Romans 10:14 NASB

I think Paul is talking about his apostleship and his calling to preach. But we can say that NO ONE can believe in Christ without hearing the gospel. I think that that obligates us to share with those who God puts in our path. People can't believe what they don't know. We know and therefore this obligates us to share.



This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on November 7, 2010. Media #527.

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