

The Missiological Purpose of Romans As Seen in its Epistolary Frame

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Why did Paul write his epistle to the Romans? What was the Apostle's original purpose? New Testament scholars have intensely debated this question in recent years. So much so that some have even despaired of ever identifying a single convincing reason or set of purposes for Romans. Traditionally, Paul's epistle to Rome has been considered a theological masterpiece, a "compendium of Christian doctrine" (Luther and Melancton). The view that Romans is to be understood as an exposition and summary of Paul's fundamental theology has been common in the history of interpretation. It is the premise of this paper that Paul's basic intent was more missiological than theological, that even the doctrinal teachings of Romans carry a missionary thrust.

It is true that Romans gives a more comprehensive treatment of doctrinal themes than any of Paul's other letters. In logical and somewhat chronological order, the inspired Apostle lays out a number of great doctrines of the Christian faith: man's sinful depravity, the gospel of God, justification by faith, righteousness with God, sanctification, predestination, glorification, and so on. But it does not follow that Romans is thus designed and primarily intended to be a teaching summary of Paul's

timeless theology. Thomas Schreiner demonstrates convincingly, I believe, that in Romans a number of “central Pauline teachings are missing or only spoken of in a glancing way” (1998, 15-16; see also Leon Morris 1995, 8). Thus Romans is not to be seen as merely an abstract theological treatise.

The question of purpose remains a vexing problem because Paul seems to say almost nothing on the subject -- aside from a few brief comments in the letter’s introduction and conclusion, as we will see. And compounding the challenge is the fact that the contents of the epistle itself do not seem to fit these general “occasional” comments. This is unlike many of Paul’s other letters.

Various Proposed Purposes

New Testament scholars have suggested any number of solutions to this problem of intent and purpose. Jervis has done a good job of summarizing all of these interpretational options under three main proposals of purpose: theological, missionary and pastoral. Under each of these three main headings she discusses numerous proposals and their proponents. For example, those who take the view that Paul’s purpose was mainly pastoral will often present the case that he is addressing either internal errors of doctrine or errors of behavior in the church; other pastoral proponents would say Paul was simply asserting his apostolic authority over the church (Jervis 1991, 14-27; for a good review of contemporary views see also Schreiner 1998, 15-21; for an older list of twelve major proposals for the purpose of Romans, see Leon Morris 1998, 7-18).

Most would agree that Paul's writing purpose can be ultimately determined by a careful exegesis of the letter itself in light of the historical circumstances. In other words, we must carefully fit the *contents* of the epistle with its *occasion*. The specific historical occasion helps us understand Paul's motivation for writing and thus sheds light on the main purpose of the Roman epistle. Douglas Moo reminds us that opinions as to the occasion "may be divided into two basic types: (1) those that stress Paul's own situation and circumstances as the occasion for Romans; and (2) those that focus on problems within the Roman community as the occasion for the letter" (1996, 16). I agree with Moo that the second proposal, that Paul's focus is upon the Romans and their needs, should be dismissed for several solid reasons:

The complete omission of any direct reference to the Romans until 11:13 makes it very difficult to think that the problems of the Roman church were foremost in Paul's mind. Then, too, there is much in this treatise that does not relate to the situation implied in chapters 14 and 15. Nor is it fair to argue that Romans must be directed to the needs of the congregation in the same way that Paul's other letters are. For one thing, Romans stands apart, by definition, as being the only letter Paul wrote to a church for which he did not have established "pastoral" responsibility. (1996,20)

This leads us to believe that Paul wrote because of his own immediate life and ministry situation. It is my contention that it was primarily a passionate missionary desire that motivated Paul to write to the Roman believers. His overriding concern, as we shall establish from the text, was to prepare for his church planting mission to Spain. He designed this letter to pave the way for his future ministry in the Western part of the Roman Empire. But before we can validate that from the letter itself, we must review what is now generally accepted to be the book's historical setting.

The Historical Occasion

Scholars agree that Paul had never been to Rome and yet it is clear from chapter 16 that numerous house churches existed in the city. Though the origin of the Roman church is uncertain, it is clear that Paul did not plant the church. Yet the fact that Paul considers this congregation to be under his sphere of influence makes it improbable that Peter or another apostle had founded the church. It is probable that Roman visitors to Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10) were converted and returned to their city to found the church. This would mean that the church was initially founded by Jewish Christians. Others suggest that “Christian slaves, merchants and artisans who traveled to Rome may have established the church” (Schreiner 1998, 11). In any case the Roman assembly, lacking an apostolic foundation, evidently existed by the late 30s or early 40s.

Both the contents of Paul’s letter and reliable tradition (see Schreiner, 11-12) confirm that the Roman church community was composed of Jews and Gentiles. At some point God-fearing Gentiles – probably from the synagogues in Rome – began to hear of Christ, embrace the Gospel and be enfolded into the young assembly. According to the trusted testimony of the Roman historian Suetonius, many Jews were evicted from Rome by Emperor Claudius (see also Acts 18:2), probably around A.D. 49. Most New Testament authorities agree that this had a significant impact on the Roman house churches. The expulsion of Jews left the churches to be mainly Gentile and meant that they were able to develop with little or no Jewish influence.

With the death of Claudius in A.D. 54, Jews in numbers began to return to Rome. Inevitably tensions arose. Jewish believers in Christ returning to the Christian church

were no doubt unhappy that the local congregation was no longer devoted to the Old Testament laws. Schreiner points out that Paul's letter seems to reflect these internal conflicts:

These tensions between Jews and Gentiles seem to be confirmed by Rom. 9-11 and 14-15. Paul's primary exhortation in both of these sections, as the exegesis of the chapters demonstrates, is directed to the Gentiles. They are to desist from pride, even though they have been joined to the olive tree of God's people and the Jews have largely been cast aside (11:17-24). They are to accept Jewish believers who have scruples in regard to food and drink and the observance of various days (14:1 - 15:13). (1998, 13)

Most commentators also agree that when Paul addressed the "weak" in 14:1 - 15:3 he was primarily speaking to Jewish believers.

The internal evidence of Romans (see especially 1:5-6,13; 11:13; 15:15-16) strongly favors the view that when Paul wrote the letter to the congregation (most likely in A.D. 56 or 57), the Gentiles were still in the majority (see Schreiner, 14-15 for a good review). This is evident, for example in the way Paul introduces his letter by saying, "We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, *among whom are you also* in Rome." (1:5,6, my emphasis and rewording of the NASV).

We know that Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, as references to Phoebe (16:1), Gaius (16:23), and Erastus (16:23) - all of whom were associated with Corinth - indicate. Luke tells us that Paul spent three months wintering in Macedonia (Acts 20:3): ample time for him to write. The Apostle wrote the epistle toward the close of his third missionary journey as he was preparing to leave for Palestine with an offering he had

collected for the poor believers in the Jerusalem church (Rom. 15:25, 26). It is also clear that Phoebe was to deliver this letter to the Roman believers (16:1,2).

Paul's Stated Reasons for Writing

All this historical reconstruction helps us better understand Paul's clear statement as to his reason for writing. As we shall demonstrate from the first and fifteenth chapters of Romans, Paul wrote to the church because of his great desire to visit Rome in preparation for future apostolic endeavors into Spain (1:10-13; 15:23-28; cf. Also Acts 19:21). Paul states:

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem ... So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. (Romans 15:23-26, 28. NIV)

As a pioneering apostle, Paul's great passion was to "preach the gospel to the regions beyond" - to break new ground where no one else had labored (II Cor. 10:16; cf. Rom. 15:20). Assuredly, Paul wanted to travel to Rome and visit believers there, but the ever missions-minded apostle really had his eye on Spain. His aim was to use this church as the base for the next step of his missionary strategy, the evangelization of Spain and probably the whole Western end of the empire, a vast region far from the support of his commissioning church at Antioch. Rome would be a logical choice from

which to begin his missions work. It was the “center of the Latin West and springboard for commerce, government and communication (Culver 1984, 116).

This paper will seek to prove that Paul’s *main* objective in writing the Roman Christians was to make sure that he would have a solid base of operations from which to launch his evangelistic church planting endeavors into Spain. The letter is clearly a self-introduction for Paul to enable him to expand his mission to the West, his eastern Mediterranean ministry having come to an end (15:19, 23).

How the Purpose of Romans Relates to Its Theme

If in fact we can validate from the body of the letter that this is Paul’s primary purpose for writing, we must still wrestle with the thorny issue of the theme of Romans. Is there a single unifying theme or “overarching topic” (see Moo, 24) for the book? And how does this theme relate to and tie in with our proposed purpose statement? Douglas Moo has done a good job of discussing the strengths and weakness of the most commonly advocated themes for Romans: “justification by faith,” “God,” “the righteousness of God,” “hope,” “salvation,” “Jew/Gentile unity,” etc. (22-30). I agree with his final conclusion that the main theme of the letter is “the gospel.” He well argues:

The word “gospel” and the cognate verb “evangelize” are particularly prominent in the introduction (cf. 1:1,2,9,15) and conclusion (15:16,19) of Romans – its epistolary “frame.” And this is the word that has pride of place in Paul’s statement of the theme of the letter: 1:16-17. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel” True, Paul goes on to speak of the interplay of salvation, the interplay of Jew and Gentile, and justification by faith; and each has been advanced as the theme of the letter. But they are all

elaborations of the main topic of these verses, the gospel. And we require a theme as broad as “the gospel” to encompass the diverse topics in Romans. Moreover, as we have seen, Romans grows out of Paul’s own missionary situation; and the gospel Paul preaches would naturally be the focus of attention in any letter that arises from such a situation. (29-30)

This last statement of Moo, I believe, gives us insight into the relationship of the letter’s missionary purpose and gospel theme. As we shall see in our exegesis of Romans one, Paul’s gospel has global implications. In fact it was already “making its triumphal progress *throughout the world* – that is, where Paul was at work *and beyond*. The gospel had already done this in Rome (cf. Rom. 1:8) – it had reached the capital before Paul’s letter” (O’Brien 1995, 55; emphasis author’s). In Romans, one can hardly separate the motif of the gospel from Paul’s own involvement with it. This close relationship of the missionary apostle and the gospel is prominent throughout the letter (see 1:1; 15:19,20; 16:25-27, etc.). O’Brien, I believe, is correct when he makes this observation from Romans:

In the light of this initial evidence from passages that deal particularly with Paul’s missionary apostleship, we believe that it is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ within God’s purposes which serves as *the bridge between Paul’s own missionary activity and that of others*. The apostolic kerygma appears to be the *critical link* between the two, and thus potentially provides the connection between Paul’s teaching about his own mission and that of mission generally. (55; emphasis author’s)

I would go further and contend that the theme of the Gospel is the vital link in Romans between Paul’s proposed mission to Spain and the corporate involvement of the church.

Furthermore, in Romans Paul is reflecting upon his mission – and theirs – *within the total purpose of God*. To help both Jewish and Gentile believers see how they fit into God’s overall redemptive plan of the ages (or “salvation history”), the Apostle goes to

great lengths to explain his own understanding of the gospel – and to show how it too fits into the continuity of God’s eternal plan of salvation. Commentators on Romans seem to be agreed on this. Stendahl is representative of the consensus: “Romans is a tractate on missions, not just in terms of missions, but in terms of how Paul’s bringing the message to the Gentiles fits into God’s total plan” (1995, 41).

But there is another tie in between the purpose and theme of Romans. Because of the tensions between Jewish and Gentile believers and the resultant questions which evidently came from both camps in regard to the soundness of his missionary message, it was necessary that Paul defend his basic theology. Moo points out that Paul no doubt introduced his gospel to the believers at Rome, at least partially, to defuse rumors (from Judaizers in Galatia and Corinth) that he was “anti-law” or even “anti-Jewish” (21). This is why a short letter would not suffice. Paul had major plans and so he felt it necessary to set forth a full exposition of the message he had preached over some 20 years. His lengthy letter would be sent early, giving the Roman church ample time to digest it, and hopefully to convince them before he arrived of the urgency to extend the gospel to Spain. Don Howell suggests that perhaps Paul’s intent was also to “deepen the Romans’ confidence in his message in light of his opponent’s criticisms, so that they will without hesitation support his Spanish mission” (1998, 95). In short, to rally their firm support for his mission to Spain, he must first *unify* the Romans around “his” gospel.

Secondary Purposes

We are acknowledging then that Paul may have several secondary purposes for writing Romans. Most New Testament scholars will argue for more than one purpose (see for example, Cranfield, 1979, 815; Bruce 1991, 175-94; Moo 1991, 16-22; Mounce 1995, 26-27, etc.). Four suggested sub-purposes have merit in the view of this author:

- 1) resolving the disunity between Jews and Gentiles (a majority position among current scholars it seems – see Schreiner, 19: footnote #42!);
- 2) presenting and defending “his” gospel;
- 3) introducing himself to the church; and
- 4) announcing his visit to Rome.

But all of these purposes are *secondary*. I heartily agree with Moo that “the various purposes share a common denominator: Paul’s missionary situation” (20). In other words, all must first be accomplished in order for the Apostle to see his main objective achieved: solidifying their support for his Spanish mission.

Another very plausible reason for the letter, as set forth by E.F. Harrison (1976, 5-6; see also Dahl, 1977, 77), is Paul’s request for intercessory prayer for his upcoming journey to Jerusalem (15:30-32), in light of threats to Paul (15:31 cf. Acts 20:3,23). If Paul could not live to take the gospel West, then perhaps his letter (a “last will and testament”, according to Bornkamm 1991, 17-31), would motivate the church to continue his work in his place. F. Walter Russell, in his fine presentation, “An Alternate Suggestion for the Purpose of Romans,” also argues for this:

Given Paul's age (mid to late 50s), his poor health due to persecution and suffering (2 Cor. 11:23-30), and his many enemies, he surely knew he would not live long enough to see the western part of the empire evangelized. So that task needed to be spearheaded by the church in Rome. This body of believers must be persuaded of their responsibility and motivated to follow Paul in fulfilling it. (1988, 182)

Thesis and Focus of Our Study

We are now ready to propose a fuller statement of what we are convinced was Paul's *primary* purpose in Romans. It is this: *by demonstrating how his own mission of bringing the gospel message to Gentiles fits into God's global redemptive plan, Paul is exhorting the Roman believers to lay aside their ethnic polarization in order to partner with him to reach the yet unreached peoples of their day.* In this paper I will seek to validate this thesis by an exegetical study of the often forgotten "epistolary frame" of the letter – found in chapters one and fifteen. Specifically, we will focus on Romans 1:1-17, where Paul lays out his own missionary theology, and on Romans 15:7-31, where Paul overviews his missionary career. In the epistle's introductory section we shall see his expression of missionary purpose and passion. In the closing section we shall see his rationale for missionary going and sending. It is our contention that everything that falls between these two "book ends" – the main body of the epistle – is simply Paul's explanation of the doctrinal basis of his mission (1:18 - 11:36) or practical discussion of Christian unity and conduct necessary for effective missions (12:1 - 15:13). And in both of these middle sections – sandwiched between his book ends – we see Paul's gospel theme further developed: in 1:18 - 11:36 he is defending his missionary gospel; and in 12:1 - 15:13 he is showing the transforming power of the gospel.

In both the introductory and concluding sections of this epistle we shall discover a common missiological thread. As Thomas Schirrmacher points out,

The frame of Romans [not only] explains the occasion and purpose of the whole letter [but also] . . . provides the platform of the [missionary] topic of the letter in its first and last verses (Romans 1:1-6 and 16:25-27): i.e. that the “*obedience of faith*” must be preached and be established among all peoples The parallels between Romans 1:1-15 and 15:14-15,27 are striking and show that Paul did not forget his mission plans during the main body of the letter. (1993, 159; author’s emphasis).

This unifying missiological theme -- and other lesser topics -- will be seen more clearly in our exegesis (to which we now turn) and will be drawn together by a comparative chart at the end of our study.

Exegesis of Romans 1:1-17

Overview

This introduction to the letter can be divided into three sections: (1) the opening (1:1-7); (2) thanksgiving and prayer (1:8-15); and (3) the theme of the letter (1:16-17). Significantly Paul does not take much time to get to his own missionary calling and future plans. In the opening (or “prescript”), the longest of any of Paul’s letters, he immediately introduces himself as a specially called missionary Apostle to the Gentiles whose message and ministry is the gospel. In the thanksgiving section Paul rejoices in the advance of the gospel to Rome, acknowledges his long-time desire to come to Rome, and shares that he is praying for the privilege to come and minister to the Romans. In the theme section Paul explains why he is so eager to proclaim the gospel to all peoples everywhere.

Paul's Missionary Commission (v.1)

In the opening verse Paul highlights his special authority by introducing himself to the Roman believers with “three parallel designations that, respectively identify his master, his office, and his purpose” (Moo, 40). First, he is “slave” (*doulos*) of Jesus Christ, i.e. one totally devoted to and at the disposal of his Master. The term focuses “not on possessing a privileged office but on service to a greater authority” (Schreiner, 32). Second, Paul says he is an “apostle”, (*apostolos*), i.e. a sent one, or authorized messenger. This title highlights the fact Paul is “among that unique group appointed by the [Risen] Christ himself to have the salvation-historical role as the ‘foundation’ of the church (Eph. 2:20).” (Moo, 41). This apostolic (missionary) office is his only because of the gracious initiative of God – he is “called.” Finally, Paul describes himself as one “set apart for the gospel of God,” i.e. “set aside by God for a special purpose in God’s plan for history.” Paul is here “claiming that his whole life is totally dedicated to God’s act of salvation in Christ” – one that involves him in the proclamation of the divine gospel message (Moo 40-42). Significantly, the two verbals “called” and “separated” are also used of Paul’s commissioning to preach the gospel to Gentiles in Galatians 1:5. They remind us that one cannot separate Paul’s conversion-call (Acts 9:22, 26). The two words are also reminiscent of the Old Testament call of the prophets Isaiah (49:1) and Jeremiah (1:5).

In verses 2-4 Paul goes on to elaborate in two ways on the content of his gospel message. He defines the gospel as something promised in the Old Testament and clarifies its central focus -- its all about God’s Son, the Risen One.

Paul's Missionary Goal and Motivation (v. 5)

Paul states that he has received his apostolic commission (lit. "the gracious apostolate" – probably one concept) through the mediation of the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, it is all due to divine favor (*charis*) and power, not Paul's own initiative or worthiness. Having again reiterated its source, Paul then speaks of the **goal** of his missionary commission: "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of the name of Christ." O'Brien correctly observes: "The three prepositional phrases in this statement, which denote *purpose* ('for the obedience of faith'), *sphere* ('among all the Gentiles') and *ultimate focus* ('for the sake of his name'), epitomize 'the totality of Paul's missionary endeavors'" (1995,58). Undoubtedly this verse is key to understanding Paul's concept of mission in Romans.

The expression, "the obedience of faith" (*eis hypakoen pisteos*) significantly appears again in 16:26, as part of the letter's concluding doxology. Thus D.B. Garlington argues:

'the obedience of faith' is to be regarded as a phrase of some significance for the understanding of Paul. It is, in other words, *his own articulation of the design and purpose of his missionary labors*: God is now bringing his purposes to pass in salvation history through Paul's gospel, i.e., the preaching of Jesus Christ [16:25]. Paul's commission then is to be viewed as nothing less than the eschatological actualization of the eternal plan to create faith's obedience among the nations. (1991, 205; author's emphasis)

There are three possible ways to interpret the genitive *pisteos*. Most likely it's either a subjective genitive or an appositional construction. If the former, "the sense would be the obedience that springs from or flows from faith." If the latter, "the phrase could be translated as "the obedience that is faith. ' " (Schreiner, 35). The first option would stress

faith as the basis for, or motivating force of, obedience. The second would see faith and obedience as equivalents, the one defining the other. The third option, and I believe the best, is to say that Paul intended both ideas (see also Schreiner, 35; Stott 1994, 52; and Garlington, 1-2). Paul uses a parallel expression in 15:18 (“the obedience of the Gentiles”). Both focus, as O’Brien points out, on “the believer’s total response to the gospel, not simply his or her initial conversion” (60). The emphasis is upon the changed life occurring when one embraces the gospel and receives Christ as Savior and Lord. Biblically, embracing and believing the gospel is an initial act of obedience (see Rom. 10:16) that leads to a continuing (persevering) life of faith and obedience. Faith and obedience can never be separated. Moo succinctly summarizes the significance of this phrase:

Viewed in this light, the phrase captures the full dimension of Paul’s apostolic [missionary] task, a task that was not confined to initial evangelization but that included also the building up and firm establishment of churches. (53)

The second prepositional phrase, “among all the Gentiles” (*pasin tois ethnesin*), clarifies the *arena* of Paul’s missionary labors. It was especially directed to the “Gentiles”. The plural form (*ethne*) used here can mean either “foreigners”, i.e. non-Jews or “nations”, i.e. peoples. Most commentators (such as Moo, 53) would take the position that in the New Testament normally the word should be taken to mean individual Gentiles as opposed to Jews -- unless the context demands otherwise. A few (Zahn, Hodge, Gifford) would contend that these are ethnic people groups or at least geographical nations in the bulk of New Testament usages. Scott (1995, 57-134) builds a

strong case for a corporate meaning by arguing that the Genesis 10 table of nations tradition strongly influenced Paul's concept of his mission. John Piper, in his highly recommended book, *Let the Nations be Glad*, devotes an entire chapter to a well-balanced discussion of the New Testament use of *ethne* (1993, 167-218). He builds a convincing case, I believe, for an ethnic people group understanding in the majority of New Testament contexts, particularly for the 18 uses of *panta ta ethne* (or its related forms). And in reference to Romans 1:5 (and its parallel in 16:26), he argues that "it is very likely that Paul has in view 'nations' or people groups and not just Gentile individuals" (196). He bases this conclusion on a careful analysis of the use of the phrase in the Greek Old Testament and from Paul's dependence on that Old Testament hope (see, for example, Acts 13:47; Gal. 3:8; Rom. 4:16-17; 15:8-12, 18-21). This author agrees. My study leads me to believe that though there are contexts in Romans that clearly demand a "Gentile individuals" (non-Jews) understanding (see Rom. 3:29; 9:24,30; 11:11,12,25; 15:9,16,18,27) there are many others that seemingly require a more corporate "nations" (peoples) sense (see Rom. 4:17,18; 15:9,10,11,12; 16:26).

One thing is indisputable, however, in 1:5. Paul is emphasizing the universal dimensions of his missionary ministry. His objective and calling is to minister the gospel "among **all** the *ethnesin*". This means:

No people group or ethnic entity was to be excluded. One of the major themes of Romans is here anticipated inasmuch as the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God on the same terms as the Jews is often proclaimed in this letter (e.g., 3:22, 31; 4:11-12, 16-17; 10:11-13; 16:26). The inclusion of all nations also functions as an indication that the covenantal promises of the OT were being fulfilled (e.g., Gen. 12:3; Isa. 19:18-25; 49:6;

Dan. 7:14,27), and that the promise to Abraham of a world-wide family is now being realized. (Schreiner, 34)

The third prepositional phrase in 1:5, “for the sake of his name”, expresses the *ultimate motivation* behind Paul’s missionary ministry. The reason he sought to induce unreached peoples to submit in faith to Christ was concern for the name and fame of Christ! The word *hyper* (“for the sake of”) indicates the reason Paul does mission. The “name” (*onoma*) clearly points back to its antecedent (*autou* in v. 5a) which refers us back to “Jesus Christ our Lord” in v. 4b. Biblically, “name” stands for “the character and being of a person” (Schreiner, 35). Ultimately, then Paul engages in missions not for personal profit or even the benefit of his converts (their salvation, etc.) but out of concern for the glory and praise of his Lord. John Stott is absolutely correct:

The highest of missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God, verse 18), but rather zeal – burning and passionate zeal – for the glory of Jesus Christ. (1994,53)

So Paul’s ultimate missionary aim was to proclaim the Name and this is accomplished through gospel preaching.

Having set forth his own apostolic commission to the Gentiles (v.1,5), Paul goes on to greet the Romans and acknowledge them as true believers (v.6,7). He thus recognizes that they, too, belong within the sphere of his apostolic commission and are to be a vital part of his universal mission. He then expresses missionary gratitude to God that the gospel has successfully spread to Rome, the capital of the Gentile world, to both Jews and Gentiles (v.8).

Paul's Missionary Devotion (v.9)

The Apostle testifies that as a missionary he has given his whole life to the service of God in the preaching of the gospel. For the third time he uses the significant term *euangelion* (gospel), stating here that he has rendered spiritual service in proclaiming it. The verb, "I serve" (*latreuo*) stresses that Paul's missionary service is intended to be an offering of deep worship to God (Moo, 58; see also O'Brien, 60-61). The qualifying phrase "in my spirit" speaks of the total involvement of Paul's whole person in the gospel. Most feel *pneuma* refers to Paul's human spirit not to the Holy Spirit, though the term might also imply that the Spirit is working through his being (see Fee 1994, 485-86; cf. also Schlatter 1995,13). Significant here is the *sphere* of Paul's service: it is "in the gospel of his Son." The term "gospel" here has a clear active sense ("a noun of agency") stressing *preaching* of the good news not the mere content of the gospel. The point is, the missionary "Paul puts his whole person into proclaiming the gospel of God's Son" (O'Brien, 61). So must we as modern-day missionaries!

Verse 9, though a parenthesis in the introduction, is crucial to understanding Paul's flow of thought in the thanksgiving section. Rather than seeing Paul on the defensive or apologetic, or even embarrassed to be writing those over whom he had no jurisdiction or previous contact, this text emphasizes Paul's apostolic authority (see Schreiner, 51-2). The reason he is thankful and prayerfully hopes to visit them is that it will be an ongoing part of his "service of the gospel".

Paul's Missionary Aspiration (vv. 11-13)

The word “for (*gar*) at the beginning of verse 11 introduces an extended section (v. 11-15) where Paul explains why he wants to visit Rome. He does so with “three roughly parallel purpose statements: ‘to share some spiritual gift’ (v.11); ‘to have a harvest’ (v.13); ‘to preach the gospel’ (v.15)” (Moo, 59). To these three can be added Paul’s statement that he also desires to encourage them through the faith that is in them (v.12). Later Paul, in this same epistle, states that he aspires to not preach where Christ has been previously named; his aim is to not build on another’s foundation (15:20-21). This raises a very perplexing question: what does Paul want to accomplish with his visit to Rome? Scholars have proposed a variety of answers (see Schreiner, 52-55 for a good overview). As Bowers has shown, Paul did not believe his apostolic work was completed unless local churches were established in the faith. To Paul, “preaching the Gospel” always meant more than initial evangelistic proclamation (1987, 196-98). The verbs Paul uses – to be strengthened (v.11 – *sterichthenai*) and to be mutually encouraged (v. 12 – *symparaklethenai*) – both show that Paul’s intent was not merely to win converts but to edify believers. Evidently both were in Paul’s mind. That he definitely did want to engage in some evangelism in Rome seems obvious from the phrase “in order that I should obtain fruit (or ‘have a harvest’) among you also” (v. 13) and from Paul’s expressed desire: “to preach the gospel to those in Rome” (v. 15).

Paul’s desire to impart to the church some “spiritual gift” (v. 11 – *charisma pneumatikon*) is also key to sorting out the real purpose of Romans (see Fee 1994, 487-88). It seems best not to view this gift as a general “blessing” (as Cranfield 1975, 79), as

merely “an insight or ability” (Moo, 54), or even as a vague reference to the spiritual gifts Paul lists elsewhere (in I Cor. 12; Rom. 12; and Eph. 4). Rather this should be understood as an “apostolic gift”. Schreiner explains:

The Roman Christians needed to understand the Pauline gospel, which proclaims the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. By grasping the union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ the Roman community would dissolve the divisions plaguing them. Paul hopes that by imparting his understanding of the gospel to them they will be strengthened for the cause of the gospel and support him in his mission to Spain. As the apostle to the Gentiles Paul desires the Romans to comprehend his gospel to the Gentiles and to be strengthened by it. (54)

So properly understood there is no real contraction between Romans 1 and 15:20. Paul’s missionary ministry included *both* initial evangelism and ongoing edification.

Paul’s Missionary Obligation (v.14)

This verse is crucial to understand Paul’s argument. His plan to have a harvest of spiritual fruit among the Roman believers came not from any desire for personal profit but because he felt a strong missionary “obligation” to all Gentile churches – including Rome. The focus of the word “debtor” (*opheiletes*) is not on “psychological” compulsion but on a divine call that ordained Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles” (Schreiner, 55; Fee 1987, 418-10). Paul seems to be referring back to his call/conversion on the Damascus Road. That this apostolic missionary commission is focused on Gentiles is evident in how Paul designates those to whom he is in debt: both Greeks and barbarians (*Hellenes te kai barbarois*), both wise and foolish (*sophois te kai anoetois*). Both these sets of words amplify the words “Gentiles” (*ethnesin*) in verse 13. The first pair seems to be describing

“all of *Gentile* humanity divided according to linguistic/cultural criteria” (Moo, 62). The term “Greeks” would refer to people of many different nationalities who had embraced the Greek language, culture, and education, i.e., the sophisticated elite. The “barbarians” would be all those not trained in the Greek language and and culture; it was a term coined in derision by the proud Greeks to describe all those they saw as “inferior.” When someone spoke in another language it sounded to the Greeks like “bar-bar-bar” or unintelligible chatter. The second pair, wise-foolish, is probably a rough equivalent of the first. However, some see this latter set not as a reference to intellectual ability but to people’s response to the preached gospel, as in Corinthians 1:18-31 (Calvin 1960, 25; Schlatter 1995, 16).

Paul’s point is that in his mission he is obligated to show no respect of persons. The gospel is to go forth to both the elite and the outcasts of the world. All peoples without exception and distinction (intellectual, cultural, or ethnic) are included as objects of Paul’s missionary zeal! Paul knows he is a debtor to all. And that, because he is obligated first of all to Christ who died for him. A debt to Christ has been transformed “into a debt to those whom Christ wished to bring to salvation.” Thus, “obligation to him who died produces obligation to those for whom he died” (Minear 1971, 102-110, esp. 104). And what Paul owes mankind is nothing but the gospel of Christ.

Paul’s Missionary Eagerness (v.15)

The Apostle’s readiness to proclaim the gospel knows no limits. In concluding this introductory thanksgiving paragraph, before going on to the thematic statement of his

epistle (v. 16,17), Paul reiterates his primary mission: preaching the gospel. That he wants to do so in the city of Rome – “to (or among) you also”, i.e., among the Roman believers – should not surprise us in light of our conclusions above. Again, there is no contradiction with his later expressed ambition in 15:20. O’Brien has done a thorough study (62-65) of how Paul typically used this verb “preach the gospel” (*euangelizomai*) and related gospel terminology, elsewhere in his epistles as well as in the immediate context of Romans one. He concludes that when the Apostle uses this term “he has in mind the whole range of evangelistic and teaching ministry – from the initial proclamation of gospel to the building up of believers and grounding them firmly in the faith” (64).

Paul’s Missionary Fearlessness (vv. 16,17)

Though grammatically subordinate to verse 15, these important verses clearly state the main theme of the letter: the gospel (*evangelion*) (as per Moo, Schreiner, etc.). For the purposes of this paper we will let the scholars debate what that theme is. Pertinent to our discussion here is Paul’s clearly stated primary aim. He desires to boldly preach the gospel in Rome (and everywhere) – *because of (gar)* its content: – it is the saving power of God revealed to all peoples. Clearly the gospel in verse 16 “forms a bridge with verses 1,9, and 15 where Paul emphasizes that his apostolic [missionary]calling is in service to the gospel” (Schreiner, 59). There is no hint in verse 16 that Paul is changing the subject of verses 1-15.

Paul the missionary is fearless because his gospel message is the “power of God” (*dynamis theou*). The sense is that it effectively works in calling sinners to (*eis* = “results in”) salvation when believed (as in I Cor. 1:23-24,26-28). “The preaching of the Word,” Schreiner (60) correctly observes, “does not merely make salvation possible but effects salvation in those who are called” i.e. in the chosen elect (see also I Thess. 1:4,5). In this context “salvation” (*soteria*) means a deliverance from the future (“eschatological”) judgment of God (Rom. 5:9,10; 13:11, etc.). Moreover, this deliverance is both past and future. It is *already* ours in Christ but *yet awaits* a future consummation (see Eph. 1:13-14).

Interestingly, Paul hints at *both* divine sovereignty and human responsibility in verse 16. Salvation is “effective” (because of God’s powerful calling) but it is also intended for “everyone who believes” (*panti to pisteuonti*). Saving faith is a sub-theme Paul introduces now and will develop later in his letter. But what does Paul mean by “everyone”? The next phrases explains: “to the Jews first and also the Greek” (*Ioudaio te proton kai Helleni*). In this context, as opposed to verse 14, “Greek” clearly designates all non-Jews, i.e. it is equivalent to *ethne* (Gentiles). Paul is stressing here the universal reach of the gospel, that it extends to both Jews and Gentiles. The gospel’s universality is another sub-theme that Paul will later develop in this letter (see 2:5-11; 3:9, 22-23,29-30; 4:9-12, 16-17; 9:24; 10:11-13; 11:32; 15:8-12). Paul is intentionally highlighting that *both* groups are included in God’s salvation purpose because he is hoping to gain their support for his preaching trip to Spain. The saving righteousness of God is now revealed and available to all groups.

What does Paul mean that the good news is to the Jews first? He may be simply referring to his missionary pattern of starting in the synagogues. More likely, he is hinting at the priority of Israel's special and sovereign election in the outworking of salvation history – another sub-theme he will develop further in Romans 9-11.

For all these reasons (the gospel's efficacy, universality, and content), Paul does not hesitate to boldly bear witness to the gospel. His assertion that he is unashamed may be a subtle reference to the suffering he has often endured as a missionary in the cause of the gospel (cf. II Cor. 11:23-27). Paul is willing to stick his neck out on the line for the gospel and publicly confess Christ. He will not, he states, be overcome by fear in his gospel missionary advance!

In conclusion, in the Paul's lengthy seventeen verse introduction, He is seeking to persuade the Romans that his missionary message of the gospel is "orthodox and worth supporting. His goal is to unify the Roman church and rally them around his gospel so that they will help him to bring the gospel to Spain" (Schreiner, 28). In the introduction Paul has laid the groundwork by proving to his readers that the expansion of world mission is God's very heart and plan. But this missiological purpose of Romans will be seen even more clearly in the closing section of the epistolary frame – Romans 15.

Exegesis of Romans 15:7-33

Overview

Whereas in the opening Paul has laid out his basic missionary theology, in this epistolary closing he briefly reviews his 20 year missionary career thereby giving his

readers his rationale for some to go with the gospel and others to send. He begins to make his “pitch” -- his direct appeal for their financial and moral support for his upcoming mission to Spain – something he’s been leading up to through all the preceding chapters. Significantly, he does not base his appeal upon any command of Christ or personal apostolic authority over them. Rather, he bases his request upon Old Testament teaching concerning Gentile missions (v. 7-12), his own missionary passion and practice (v. 15-21), and his own personal needs and missionary strategy (v. 22-33).

The Scriptural Basis of Gentile Missions (vv. 7-12)

Because Christ has accepted both Jews and Gentiles (both the “strong” and “weak”) into his family, Paul exhorts the Roman believers – both Jew and Gentile – to mutually accept one another in order to bring glory to God (v.7). The next two verses then further unpack and explain (cf. *gar*) Paul’s exhortation. First he reminds them that in His earthly ministry Christ came as a minister in order to (*eis*) “confirm” the saving promises that God made to the patriarchs. Paul has just dealt with this theme in Romans 9-11. Here Paul wants particularly the Jewish believers in Rome to recognize that the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenanted promises in no way excludes the Gentiles. God’s original purpose certainly included them because from the very beginning He pledged that all nations would receive His blessing. No doubt Paul is here recalling Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 (cf. Acts 4:25). He clearly has in mind the Abrahamic covenant, reaffirmed four times in Genesis alone, and amplified by Paul himself earlier in this letter (4:13,19-17, etc.). Paul says Jehovah intends that the Gentiles

“glorify” him for his covenantal “mercy” (*eleous* – the term harks back to the Old Testament concept of *hesed* or “loyal love”). He wants them to be able to praise Him because they are the “undeserved recipients of his saving kindness” (Schreiner, 756).

In 15:9-12 Paul goes on to cite five quotations from the Old Testament proving that all the nations (*ethne* = people groups – see previous discussion under 1:5) will one day praise the Lord together: II Sam. 22:50; Psa. 18:50; Deut. 32:43; Psa. 117:1; Jer. 11:10. The words “just as” (*kathos*) introducing this rapid sequence of citations (from all three parts of the Tanach) should be seen as a ground or support of the basic premise that Gentiles as well as Jews are to be beneficiaries of God’s infinite mercy. Significantly, the verb “glorify” (*doxasai*) is further explained by five parallel terms: “praise” (*exomologesomai* – v.9), “sing” (*psalo* – v.9), “rejoice” (*euphrantheite* – v.10), “praise” (*aineite* – v.11), and “give praise” (*epainesatosan* – v. 11). This shows that God desires to be glorified by the worship that springs from the hearts and lips of redeemed ethnic peoples.

It is striking that with this string of Old Testament quotes Paul is clearly demonstrating that the gospel and world missions do not stand against the Old Testament but rather are backed by it! It is vital to see that the Apostle found whole-Bible authority for the church’s sending mission to Gentiles. As Adolf Schlatter writes:

God’s goal proclaimed by the Scriptures is to praise God jointly, together with all nations. In 2 Sam. 22:50 Paul presumably heard Christ who desires to acknowledge God among the nations and to sing praises to the honor of his name. The fact that the community is doing this, is Christ’s work. Deuteronomy 32:43 is cited because its declaration calls the nations, with Israel, to praise God together. Psalm 117:1 proclaims that all nations, without distinction and exception, are invited to praise God. Isaiah 11:1, 10 bases the nations’ worship of God on the fact that they are under

Christ's dominion. . . . Paul bases his petition on the promise of the Scriptures. (Schlatter 1995, 262-63)

Furthermore, Paul's inspired use of these texts shows us that while many Old Testament quotations speak of Jews – and continue to do so to this day – they are also meant for Gentile believers “who not only rejoice that they receive salvation but are commissioned to spread the gospel to all the other peoples” (Schirrmacher, 19).

The Origin and Power of Paul's Gentile Mission (vv. 15-16a)

The Apostle again reminds the Romans of the priority of God's grace in his missionary career. “Because of the grace that was given [aorist] to me from (or by) God [I am] a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.” In other words he was a “sent one” because of God's initial calling on the Damascus road. AS we have seen, Paul continually saw himself as wholly dependent upon the special gift of God's sovereign grace (cf. 1:5). O'Brien properly reminds us:

And it was the *whole of his missionary career*, not just his calling or commissioning, that was due to the overwhelming grace of God (it is all of v. 16 that is dependent on this key expression): divine mercy provided the source and power for the whole course of his ministry. (30)

Again, Paul reiterates his special responsibility for and calling to the Gentiles. The implication: this would include the Roman church.

The Task and Goal of Paul's Gentile Mission (v. 16b)

In this remarkable sentence Paul states that his missionary *task* is to “minister as a priest” (*hierourgounta*) the “gospel of God.” Together with his claim earlier in this verse

to be a “minister (*leitourgon*) of Christ Jesus,” Paul is here piling up Old Testament priestly (ritual cultic) terminology. His amazing claim is: when he proclaims the divine gospel, he is actually acting on Christ’s behalf in discharge of sacred priestly duties.

Paul goes on to mention the overall *goal* of his missionary career: it is “*in order that* the offering (*prosphora* - his third priestly term) of the Gentiles might be acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” What exactly is the “offering” Paul seeks to offer up? Some see it as the actual praise or obedience of the Gentiles (a subjective genitive); but it is more likely that the offering is the Gentiles themselves (an appositional genitive – see Moo, 890; Cranfield, 756, etc.). O’Brien sees this unusual phrase as referring to “*both* the Gentiles *and* their gifts” (31). The point is, the Gentiles whom Paul wins to Christ do not bring their own offering to Him – they *are* the offering! And Paul probably sees all this as a fulfillment of Isaiah 66:18-20 which describes how God’s glory will be one day declared to the nations. Evidently the Apostle saw this being fulfilled in his own missionary ministry. For Paul’s offering of believing Gentiles to be ultimately “acceptable” (*euprosdektos*) to God (cf. I Pet. 2:5) it had to be “sanctified” (*hegiasmene*) or made holy by the work of the Spirit. Undoubtedly Paul was confident Christ through His Spirit had already done this. He recognizes it was ultimately the work of Christ to turn Gentiles “from unclean and sinful creatures to ‘holy’ offerings fit for the service and praise of a holy God” (Moo, 891).

Some suggest that the apostle may here also have had in mind the offerings he had collected from the Gentile churches. As Paul is about to leave for Jerusalem with the

sacrificial offerings given by impoverished Gentile saints, “he perceives the gift as a token and seal of his own greater and more far-reaching sacrifice to God” (Howell, 113).

There does, however, seem to be one final reason Paul uses all this difficult-to-understand symbolic ritual language in 15:16. Culver points out, “In this manner Paul puts the projected mission of evangelists *going* to Spain and of others *sending* on the very highest possible level of human religious effort ... no other wording could more fully convey the holiness of the project” (127).

The Fulfillment and Results of Paul's Gentile Mission (vv.18-19, 23a)

As Paul begins to summarize what the risen Christ has accomplished through him, he begins to reiterate once again the *purpose* of all his missionary labors: to bring a new people of God under Christ's lordship. He humbly acknowledges that his ministry has been blessed of God “*for (eis = resulting in) the obedience (hypakoe) of the nations (ethne, here not 'Gentiles')*.” This phrase is clearly equivalent to “the obedience of faith” in 1:5 and 16:26 which we considered earlier. We concluded then that it is best interpreted as a reference not just to the *conversion* of Gentiles but to their *continuance* in faithful obedience. That this important expression occurs in chapters 1, 15, and 16 – “at two highly significant positions in the letter, where it forms a frame or envelope (*inclusio*)” -- highlights the obvious fact that it is “a programmatic statement of the main purpose of the letter to Romans” (O'Brien, 32; and Garlington 1990, 201).

More immediate to our study here is Paul's further statement describing the *means* by which his missionary ministry is being fulfilled. With a series of datives he shows

why his evangelistic work is so effective. It is because Christ has worked through Paul “by word and deed (*logo kai ergo*), by the power of signs and wonders (*en dynamei semeion kai teraton*), by the power of the Spirit of God (*en dynamei pneumatos theou*).” In other words, Paul’s entire ministry – spoken or written words, as well as all his deeds and every miracle – was accomplished only by the Spirit’s enabling. Here signs and wonders refer to the miracles that Paul did confirming and validating the truth of his apostolic gospel (see II Cor. 12:12, also Acts 2:43; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12; cf. Heb. 2:3-4). Certainly they were the *marks* of a true apostle but they were also performed because Christ Himself worked dynamically through Paul.

At the end of verse 19 Paul delineates the spectacular *results* (*hoste*) of his missionary ministry: he has “fulfilled” the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum (roughly modern day Albania and former Yugoslavia). How exactly this claim and geographical reference is to be interpreted is the subject of much discussion (see O’Brien, 36-43 and Moo, 894-96 for good overviews of the variety of suggestions). Probably the best way to understand Paul’s incredible claim is this: he is simply stating that as a missionary he moved around “in a circuitous route” as he traveled between these two locations (This agrees with the NASB rendering “round about”). These geographical points, then, are to be regarded as exclusive not inclusive. Paul is stating the *limits* of his preaching, not necessarily claiming to have actually ministered in both places.

That being so, how can Paul claim to have “fulfilled” (*peplerokenai* or “fully preached”) the gospel in all these areas? And in what sense can he say in v.23 that there

is “no further place (*topon* = “opportunity”) for me in these regions”? Obviously this cannot mean he has preached the gospel to every single individual person in the eastern areas of the Roman Empire – or even to every small town. The context (verses 20-21) help us determine Paul’s meaning. His missionary ambition is to preach the gospel “not where Christ was already named.” By “named” Paul surely means where Christ has not been “confessed” or “acknowledged.” So Paul’s missionary goal is to plant new churches (that’s the idea of laying a “foundation,” cf. I Cor. 3:10) only in those pioneer areas where no one else has preached the gospel yet. His point then in verse 19 is that he has finished his goal of planting viable growing churches in needy unreached areas throughout the entire region extending from Jerusalem to Illyricum. The Acts verifies that Paul’s strategy was evidently one of establishing strong churches in strategic cities (such as Thessalonica, Ephesus, and Corinth) and then leaving his co-laborers with the task of spreading out to evangelize the smaller towns in the surrounding regions (Schreiner, 769-70; cf. O’Brien 42-3).

To sum up, what Paul is claiming in verses 19, and 23 is to have concluded his “special apostolic task of planting strategic churches” (Moo, 896). Enough new churches had been planted firmly and widely enough to insure that Christ’s name would soon be heard throughout the area. Thus Paul could leave for another area, his missionary task being completed. This interpretation has been confirmed by the good work of Paul Bowers; by analyzing all of Paul’s epistles he has demonstrated that this was what Paul saw as the full scope of his missionary vocation – not just initial evangelism, but founding and nurturing solid growing churches (Bowers 1987, 185-198).

The Passion and Motivation of Paul's Gentile Mission (vv. 20-21)

The word “thus” (or “in this manner”) at the beginning of these verses ties Paul’s explanation to his previous argument. In effect he is saying: “Here’s how I am fulfilling the gospel – by striving to preach it where Christ is unnamed lest I build on another person’s foundation.” Here we clearly see Paul’s all-consuming ambition, his passion, the driving motivation of his missionary heart! Without a doubt this is a very significant statement for understanding Paul’s strategy and normal missionary policy.

The concept of “naming” (*onomazomai*) Christ clearly means here “name in worship” (cf. Eph. 1:21). So Paul’s normal policy is to go to areas where Christ is not worshipped and honored, i.e. to virgin gospel territories. Clearly Paul’s calling was to be a pioneer, to pull up stakes and move on once the “foundation” for a gospel church was firmly established (see also II Cor. 10:13-18). Significantly, Paul uses the metaphor of building here to describe the work of ministry (cf. Also I Cor. 3:9-15). By it he does not intend to put down those who do pastoral care (i.e. those who come along later and build on the planter’s foundation); he is simply clarifying what his own missionary calling was.

Does this verse mean that Paul *never* preached where churches already existed? Hardly! His desire to come to Rome proves that. What Paul is expressing here is the strong desire of his heart not an absolute rule. Paul’s “aim” should not be expanded into a rigid law which knows no exceptions. As Cranfield states, “There is no suggestion here that he felt himself under an absolute obligation to refrain from ever visiting a church which had been founded by someone else” (1979, 764-65). This is seen

too in Paul's precise wording: the negative is attached not to the infinitive "to proclaim" but to the adverb "where". So Paul does not say, "Where Christ has been named I will not preach" but "My ambition is to proclaim not where Christ has been named." In other words, it is a matter not of "prohibiting where he shall preach but of selecting where he will make strategic choices to proclaim the gospel" (O'Brien, 44). No doubt the main reason Paul even mentions this ambition to reach new territories is to explain why he will not settle down in Rome but will be passing through on his way to Spain!

That Paul was not on some kind of an ego-drive in verse 20, wanting to take all the credit for church planting throughout the Empire, is obvious from the next verse. What drives Paul and gives him vision as a pioneer missionary is "the Old Testament conception of God's worldwide purpose" (Piper, 195). He quotes Isaiah 52:15, "They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand." John Piper explains the significance of this Old Testament "prophetic vision of hope" that ultimately drove Paul:

In the Old Testament these words are immediately preceded by: "So shall He startle *many nations (ethne polla)*: kings shall shut their mouths because of him" (Isaiah 52:15). No doubt Paul reflected on the fact that his commission from the Lord came to him in similar words. In a close parallel to Isaiah 52:15, the risen Lord Jesus had said to Paul that he is 'to carry [Christ's] name before the *nations (ethnon)* and *kings*" (Acts 9:15).

In other words, Paul is being driven by a personal commission from the Lord which has been richly buttressed and filled out with a prophetic vision of hope. He was gripped by the Old Testament purpose of God to bless all the nations of the earth (Galatians 3:8) and to be praised by all the peoples (Romans 15:11), and to send salvation to the end of the earth (Acts 13:47), and to make Abraham the father of many nations (Romans 4:17), and to be understood in every group where He is not known (Romans 15:21). (Piper, 195)

It is also most interesting to observe that Isaiah 52:15 is part of the famous fourth “servant” passage, and the “him” concerning whom these Gentiles have not been told is clearly the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord. So Paul seems to again be stressing the content of his gospel – Christ Himself. As Moo so aptly sums up, “Paul’s pioneer church-planting ministry among the Gentiles is fulfilling the Old Testament prediction about Gentiles coming to see and understand the message about the Servant of the Lord (898).

The Practical Needs of Paul’s Ongoing Mission (vv. 22-33)

In this final section Paul finally “gets to where he’s going.” He invites the Roman church to partner with him in his upcoming missionary project and to share in the support of it. This author agrees with Culver:

Some authors have pronounced all of Romans 15:14-33 an epilogue, his instructions and exhortations being complete. Others, certainly correct, assert that herein Paul arrived at the ultimate purpose in writing the epistle to the Romans, which was to make Rome the strategic base of his future missionary effort in the western part of the Roman world. After reading this climactic statement of the main design of the letter, it may be used as a guide in interpreting the previous parts – something the first recipients could not do when they first heard it read in their assembly. They could only do so on the second time over (Culver, 128).

In the remaining exegesis I will only seek to summarize, using several propositions (and here indebted to Culver, 128-131), what Paul says. We shall discover how all this readily applies to the unending task, the *going* and *sending* mission of the Church in every generation.

A New Missions Venture to be Launched

Paul's plan to transfer his missionary activity to Spain, is now directly stated. Significantly the whole paragraph begins (vs. 22-24) and ends (vs. 28-29) and thus has as its main theme Paul's intention to visit Rome. Dr. Luke later hints at this in his historical account. Not long after Paul wrote the Roman epistle, while he was still in the midst of his three year campaign in Ephesus, "Paul purposed in the spirit to go Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome'" (Acts 19:21). Paul had already given his reasons but now he summarizes once again: he has no more "opportunity" to preach/plant in the eastern Mediterranean (v. 23 – see our interpretation above with v. 19). As the better translations show Paul never finishes his original sentence in v. 24, "Whenever I go to Spain --." After an excursus (v. 24b-27), explaining his more immediate schedule (taking the offering first to Jerusalem then sailing to Rome), he transitions back to his "main" theme in v. 28, "Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain." So the timing of his trip to Spain (and Rome in passing) will depend on his prior "ministry" to the saints at Jerusalem. He wants them to understand he cannot leave for Spain until he has delivered the collection.

What does he mean by "putting my seal on this fruit"? A seal usually carries the idea of "an official affirmation of authenticity." If so, Paul is saying he intends to accompany the love offering "in order to affirm its integrity and insure it is understood

rightly" (Moo, 906-7). We know from Acts 21-28 that Paul lost all control for several years of the above travel plans. When he finally got to Rome it was as a prisoner.

Why did Paul chose Spain for his next (fourth) missionary trip? No doubt he was convinced the Spirit was leading him (Moo, 900-1). Some suggest that this was just the natural extension of Paul's "arc" from Jerusalem to Illyricum (see v.19). Others (see Schreiner, 775) propose that Paul viewed Spain as the Old Testament "Tarshish" and the "end of the earth" (cf. Isa. 66) to which Paul must go before the final coming of Christ (cf. Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10). The conversion of those in Spain would be in Paul's eyes, a fulfillment of Isaiah's words that God's glory would one day be proclaimed among the nations (66:19). This final view is very plausible. But the strong possibility that Paul would have also known about yet unreached peoples in regions of modern-day India, Germany and Britain, however, militates against Paul being convinced Christ would return once he had completed his Spanish mission (see Schreiner, 775).

Whether Paul ever finally reached Spain is not known for certain from the New Testament. However, early Christian documents seem to indicate he did (I Clement; see also on this matter, Bruce, *Paul*, 447-818). There are also strong local traditions in various regions of Spain that he did (see Culver, 128-29).

A Needed Missionary Team to be Formed

That a trusted missionary party to take the collection to Jerusalem had already been formed can be assumed by comparing statements here in Romans with those in the later part of Acts. Let's first reconstruct the scene from Romans. The Christians

(churches) of Macedonia and Achaia (modern Greece, Macedonia, and Southern Albania) had given the money to relieve the struggling believers in the mother church at Jerusalem (15:26). It was both their duty and their delight to do so. Paul says the Gentiles were “indebted” (*opheiletai*) to the Jewish church (v. 27); but he also points out they were “pleased” (*eudokensan*) to give and that they did so freely (v. 26,27; cf. also II Cor. 8,9). Because Paul was apprehensive that anti-Gentile sentiments of Jewish believers in Jerusalem might prevent him from personally delivering the gift, he asked the Roman believers to pray they would actually receive it (15:31). He was also fearful that he might come to harm at the hands of jealous non-Christian Jews in Palestine (15:31). All this we know from the book of Romans.

From Acts we learn that Paul was not traveling alone. Luke uses the first person plural (“we”) throughout the accounts in Acts 20-28. It seems that Dr. Luke remained with Paul right on through the two years of his imprisonment at Caesaria and the eventual voyage to Rome (see Acts 27:1; 28:1). Thus, with Culver, we can safely assume that “other of the well-known associates of Paul, veterans of the eastern campaigns, were to join him at Rome.” Tradition tells us that there were also two young believers from Rome that sailed with Paul to Spain (Culver, 129). Could they have joined Paul’s other long-time team mates?

In modern missions, following Paul’s frequent example, we too need to capitalize on the many benefits of working together in missionary teams to advance the Gospel!

Universal Christian Support to be Assumed

We see this first of all in the cooperative collection which Paul took up. In verse 27 he argues that Gentile believers have a special duty: "For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to them also in material things." Obviously he speaks of a moral rather than a legal obligation. Even Paul as an apostle could not compel them to give! Because the spiritual blessings of the gospel stem from the Jews (and their Messiah), Paul wanted them to realize they had a spiritual obligation to provide material (financial) assistance. This would allow both groups to share in the partnership of the gospel. Paul seems here again to be alluding to what he has previously taught in Romans 9-11: that the Jews were especially worthy of support because of their election as God's people and "salvation - historical priority" in the plan of God (Schreiner, 777-78; Moo, 905).

Thus Paul is setting forth a biblical principle: that Christians are responsible to give support. This principle can be extended to the support of missions in unreached areas where ordinary believers cannot go (Culver, 129). Teaching elsewhere in the New Testament confirms this principle. In this same epistle Paul asks, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (10:15), thus implying that believers have an obligation to provide whatever it takes to send out evangelists and missionaries. This also agrees nicely with his argument in I Corinthians 9:7 for the support of apostles and other itinerant missionary teachers: "Who ... serves as soldier at his own expense?" Believers today also need to be biblically challenged and taught their privilege and responsibility to support missionaries sent out to unreached peoples!

Personal Appeal for Missionary Support to be Encouraged

In these final verses Paul plainly and directly asks for three kinds of support from the believers at Rome for his upcoming Spanish mission: moral, material and intercessory. Because he has selected Rome and the Roman church to be the base for his new missionary thrust, he urgently needs their threefold assistance. This, we are contending, is the *raison d'être* of the epistle.

First, he solicits their *friendship* – he calls it “enjoying your company for a while” (v. 24). He is now beginning to elaborate on what he has only hinted at earlier in v. 23-24a: that he hopes to fulfill his long desire to visit them. At the beginning of the letter he had also mentioned this intent in passing; but he claimed there that his purpose was to “preach the Gospel” in Rome (1:15). Now he begins to spell out that in fact he will stay in Rome but a short time (“for a while,” literally “in part”) and that in fact he will only be “passing through” on his trip to Spain.

The difference in emphasis between here and chapter one is probably because of Paul’s sensitivity about financial matters. At the beginning of the letter he is reluctant to even hint about money; he wants to wait until he has established a solid relationship with the congregation through his letter before raising the issue of money (Moo, 901-2). But the point is, he values and needs their moral support and friendship “first.” He wants to give them an opportunity to really get to know him personally so that they understand his strengths, weakness, and needs. This, he knows, will be vital in order to maintain their continuing financial and prayer support. Modern missionaries who engage in “deputation” (or “pre-field ministry”) have grown to appreciate the

importance of cultivating close relationships with their support base before heading to the field. Paul seems to be modeling that here. The fact that Paul worked hard to maintain a long-time quality relationship with his commissioning church at Antioch is another fine example (Acts 11:20-26; 12:25-13:3; 14:26-28; 15:28-41).

Second, Paul solicits their *material* support. This is seen in his statement “ [I hope] to be helped on my way there by you” (v.24). The verb here is *propempe* (= to send forth) which is used nine times in the New Testament (Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; I Cor. 16:6,11; II Cor. 1:16; Titus 3:13; III John 6) and on each occasion clearly denotes “active help toward the carrying out of the proposed mission ... more than a mere farewell accompanied with prayers and good wishes” (Cranfield 2:769). Thus the word became a technical term for missionary support and other provisions. Cranfield, in fact, points out that the *prompempo* “was used to denote the fulfillment of various services which might be required by a departing traveller, such as the provisions of rations, money, means of support, letters of introduction, and escort for some part of the way” (*Ibid.*). Exactly what kind of support Paul desires he does not specify. The fact that the basic meaning of the verb is “to accompany” or “to escort” may indicate that Paul is “hoping for coworkers to join him in the word. Help with the customs and languages of the new territory may also be included” (Moo, 901, footnote #26). From this word study, I would conclude that at the very least Paul has in mind financial and logistical support; possibly he would also appreciate personnel, i.e. either short or long-term co-laborers.

Now we can, I believe, understand why Paul waited until the end to make his personal appeal for financial support. As Schreiner points out:

He knew such support would not be forthcoming unless they had a firm grasp of the Pauline gospel. Thus he articulated his gospel in some detail in the letter [chapters 1-14] so that the Romans would comprehend the basics of his gospel and so that they could reply to critics who distorted what Paul taught. (774).

In other words, it was for Paul a matter of appropriate timing to bring up the subject of support.

We can properly conclude that missionaries today have solid biblical (Pauline) precedent for asking for support – rather than just “trusting God” only and informing no one of one’s financial needs! In other words, “living by faith” *and* actively raising support are not contradictory. The key issue is that God’s envoys must have the right motives as they ask God’s people for help. Certainly one proper motive would be to be used of God to awaken missionary concern in the churches. Paul no doubt had that aim. The other key lesson we learn from Paul’s example is that “friend raising” must precede “fund raising”! People give to missionaries they know personally and have confidence in.

Third, Paul solicited their *prayer* support (v. 30-33). In fact he almost begs them for their intercessory participation in his mission: “I urge (*parakalo*) you, brethren, ... strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” (v.30). As Moo points out, the first verb is a strong one and should not be weakened to “ask” or “request” (909). Paul highlights the urgency of missionary prayer all the more by two qualifying phrases which show the grounds of his exhortation: “by (*dia* = through) our Lord Jesus Christ and by (*dia*) the love of the Spirit.” With the first Paul stresses the *authority* by which he makes his request: he is pleading for prayer “in the name of” the Lord Jesus. With the

second phrase Paul is stressing the *motivation* for prayer: the love that comes from and is inspired by the Holy Spirit (*Ibid.*). The verb “strive together” (*synagonisasthai*) is very descriptive conveying the ideas of “discipline, energy, and earnestness” (Schreiner, 782). Paul is calling for missionary prayer that is effectual before God. Moo tells us, “Paul’s use of the metaphor of fighting and wrestling may imply something about the nature of prayer that he is requesting: that it involves wrestling with God; or that it must be especially diligent” (910). At the very least Paul is calling on the Romans to identify with and partner with him in effective prayer. True prayer we see in verse 30 involves two qualities: *proper motivation* (Paul gave two!) and *proper dedication* (it is spiritual warfare!).

It also involves *proper information* – this is why Paul lists three very specific prayer requests in verses 31-32. First, he wants them to pray for his personal safety: that he might be rescued from the disobedient in Judea, i.e. from non-Christian Jews there. In light of the antagonism and assault he actually did face in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27-36), this was a perceptive and reasonable request. Then, too, if God did not preserve his life he would never be able to missionize in Rome and eventually in Spain! Second, he asks for prayer for a proper reception by believers in Jerusalem: that his gifts (“my ministry”) for the saints might be “acceptable”. Third, he requests prayer that he might, by God’s will, actually reach (“come” to) Rome, experiencing refreshment and fellowship. Paul thus recognizes that all of his missionary plans are subject to the will of a Sovereign God. Ironically this is seen in the way that God “answered” Paul’s three prayer requests:

He *was* delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, but only by being locked up by the Romans for two years. The collection *was*, apparently, accepted by the Jewish Christians (or at least most of them [cf. Acts 21:17], but Paul's subsequent arrest in the temple precincts must have raised Jewish Christians' suspicions about him again. And Paul *did* get to Rome and experience some measure of joy and refreshment (cf. Phi. 1:12-19; 2:25-30), but he arrived there in Roman chains. (Moo, 911)

The clear lesson is that in the global progress of the gospel, God's ways are not always ours! He often uses persecutions and "setbacks" to ultimately advance His Cause. And so we must learn to pray for missions with a strong confidence in the final sovereignty of God as He works out His plan to build His Church!

Summary and Chart

We have seen that Paul wastes no time in his letter to get to his future plans. In the letter's introductory section (1:1-17) he introduces himself as a God-commissioned Apostle to the Gentiles (1:1, 5) and quickly states his great desire to preach the gospel to all men without exception. He makes clear that he does not accept barriers of culture and race, or education and social stratum (1:14) and therefore wants also to come to Rome (1:10,11,15). As a missionary he rejoices that the gospel has advanced to Rome (1:8) – but clearly longs to see it go farther West. To whet their appetite he even introduces a succinct summary of his missionary theology (1:5): his missionary work has a clear *goal* (the obedience of faith), a *target audience* (Gentiles = nations) and an *ultimate motivation* (glorifying Christ's "name"). From this practical (missionary) topic Paul then switches to the "proper" (theological) theme of Romans: the gospel (1:16,17).

But it is evident throughout this opening – and the rest of the book – that his gospel and mission are integrally related. As a missionary he is set apart to the gospel (1:1,9,15,16). Thus we see that Romans 1:1-17 is not some lengthy but redundant introduction, unrelated to the rest of the book. It tells the very purpose of Romans: to prove that the expansion of global missions (and the gospel) is God’s very heart and plan.

This same purpose is seen at the end of the body of direct teaching in chapter 15.

Once again Paul unfolds his missionary intent by:

- 1.) reminding his readers that Christ came to confirm the Old Testament promises of blessing to all nations (15:8,9);
- 2.) quoting five Old Testament texts that prove that all peoples/nations will one day hear the gospel and glorify God in worship (15:8, 90);
- 3.) summarizing Christ’s blessing on his previous missionary career (15:16-19);
- 4.) clarifying his present missionary passion and policy (15:20-24); and
- 5.) sharing his practical plans and future missionary strategy (15:22-33).

Of note in this final section is the fact that Paul repeats several items he mentioned earlier in the introduction and finally makes his direct appeal for their moral (15:24), material (15:24) and prayer (15:30-32) support of his upcoming mission to Spain.

The missionary purpose of Paul is even more conclusive when we compare the entire concluding part of Romans 15:7 - 16:27 with the introduction. This “epistolary frame” explains the occasion and purpose of the whole letter and provide a platform for the gospel theme of the book. Significantly, in the first and last verses of the frame (1:1-6 and 16:25-27) we see a common missionary thread which ties the book together: “the

obedience of faith" (1:5; 16:26 cf. 15:18) must be preached and established among all nations (= people groups) – just as the Old Testament had predicted.

I am indebted to several commentators who have pointed out the missiological parallels in the opening and closing sections of Romans. Paul Minear may have been the first to note the "structural symmetry." In his fine volume, *The Obedience of Faith*, commenting on a comparative chart, he says

We have earlier noted the degree to which the matters mentioned at the outset correspond to those which received attention at the end, showing how the same intentions bracket the intervening chapters ... All of the items above have a bearing upon Paul's purposes in writing this letter (1971, 37).

Walter Russell, in an insightful article in "*Bibliotheca Sacra*," also gives a chart, with this comment:

The challenge to the Roman church to participate fully in God's present harvest of all peoples forms an obvious bracket to the bulk of the epistle . . . These [missiological] intentions heavily flavor the intervening body of the epistle, or better, the body of the epistle simply develops and explains Paul's missiological intentions for the Romans (1988, 183).

Others more recently have followed suit and provided helpful charts showing parallels (see Schirrmacher 1993, 160; and Moo, 886). Taking all their ideas and adding a few of my own, I submit the following comparative summary chart.

**Missiological Parallels Between
Romans 1:1-17 and 15:7 - 16:27**

1:1,15-16	The Centrality of the Gospel	15:16
1:1-6	The Gospel Foretold in the Old Testament	16:25-27
1:5	Paul's Missionary Assignment: to the Gentiles	15:15-16
1:5b	Missionary Goal: All Peoples to Obedient Faith	15:18; 16:26
1:5c	Missionary Motive: God to be Glorified	15:9-12
1:8	Romans' Faith: Known Worldwide	16:19
1:9-10	Missionary Prayer	15:30-32
1:10-13	Missionary Travel Plans: Jerusalem to Rome	15:22-29
1:13	Paul's Desire/Plans Frustrated	15:22
1:11	Desiring to Strengthen their Faith	15:13; 16:25
1:12,14	Mutual Gospel Indebtedness	15:27
1:13	Paul's Pioneering Policy and Passion	15:20,21
1:13-16	Missionary Scope/ Destinations: All Peoples/Regions	15:15-29; 16:26

How Paul's Missiological Purpose is Established Elsewhere in Romans

I will but list various other sub-themes and recurring motifs in Romans which I believe have been skillfully interwoven by Paul to set forth his main missionary purpose. For those unconvinced who would like to do further study of my basic premise, I will give, where possible, scholarly sources.

1. **Universalism vs. Particularism.** In Paul's presentation of salvation history in Romans we see both a universalism and a particularism. The God Paul presents in Romans is clearly a missionary God who desires **all** peoples to come to faith in His Son. The gospel is for *all* who believe (1:16; 3:22; 4:14; 10:11) because "*all* have sinned" (3:23); thus *whoever* will call on His name will be saved (10:13). Yet in Romans we also see a note of particularism. Even in the familiar 1:16 Paul follows with "to the Jew **first**". In Romans 9-11 Paul fully develops this theme. God selected a particular nation – Israel – but for a purpose. Israel was meant to be a light to the Gentiles: the blessings of salvation were to flow through His chosen people to all other peoples. This dualism – of salvation accessible to all without exception or distinction *and* the priority of Israel and her certainty of final redemption – fits well into Paul's missiological framework (See Standahl, 33-43).
2. **Racial Reconciliation.** Paul's missionary plans would be hindered (if not thwarted) if ethnic differences between Jews and Gentiles in the Roman congregation were not resolved. Knowing this, one of Paul's subsidiary purposes in writing was evidently to show the reconciling effects of the gospel upon both groups. In a preemptive fashion, Paul hits head on the problems of ethnocentrism and racial bigotry. Paul's numerous practical exhortations were probably designed to strengthen directly relationships between Jewish and Gentile Christians within the local house churches: do not judge one another (2:1; 14:1-4,9,13-17); do not be hypocritical (2:21); do not boast over others (11:13,17-18; do not be arrogant (11:20); do not be high-minded (12:3) each member belongs to all the others (12:5); honor one another above

yourselves (12:9); love your neighbor as yourself (13:9); behave decently ... not in dissension (13:13); accept the weak (14:1; 15:1-9); do not put a stumblingblock before a brother (14:13-23); do what leads to peace (14:9); watch out for those who cause divisions (16:17). Paul also confronts the prejudicial boastful/critical language of both groups (5:11; 8:33-34a; 14:4,10,13,19). He also counteracts ethnic hostility with heavy theological teaching: showing the equal basis and leveling aspects of the gospel (Rom. 1-5,9-10), and teaching in chapters 9-11 that the inclusion of the Gentiles was part of God's sovereign master plan. For these thoughts I am indebted to Randy Colver who has done an excellent study of the racial reconciliation theme in Romans (1999). See also Russell's insightful comments on the problem of ethnocentrism in the Roman church (181-3).

3. **Rationale for Sending.** Paul's best explanation of the urgency for sending missionaries to unreached peoples is found in Romans 10. After reminding the Romans of his passion to see men saved, especially Jews (10:1), Paul spends the rest of this chapter showing the believers – both Jewish and Gentile – that they must hold themselves responsible for *bringing* the good news to the ends of the earth. His emphasis is upon *human sending* not divine sending (10:14-15). Unless a gospel messenger is **sent** and proclaims the Word men will perish because faith only comes by hearing the preached Word (10:17)! This basic premise Paul then proves – especially for the Jewish believers – from the Jewish Bible by quoting Lev. 18:5, Deut. 30:11-14; Isa. 28:16; Joel 2:32; Isa. 52:7; 53:1; and Psa. 19:4. Paul thus shows that Gentiles have equal access with Jews to the gospel. He demonstrates that all

religious distinctions based on race or any other human feature are foreign to the gospel of Christ (10:11-13). Romans 10 is thus vital to understanding Paul's missions theology. Was Paul perhaps laying the groundwork in chapter 10 for his later appeal for missionary personnel to join his Spanish team (15:24 = "on my way" = escorted)? For a good overview of Romans 10 from a missiological perspective see Robert Culver (119-122).

4. **Salvation-History.** Rather than seeing Romans 9:1 - 11:36 as "an excursus" (as some have), or subsuming the who Jew/Gentile issue under the greater theme of "justification by faith," an increasing number of exegetes are now suggesting (I believe correctly), that this key section relates well to Paul's overall missiological design/direction. Representative of this perspective is Walter Russell; here is his summary of how Romans 9-11 fits into the overall flow of thought of Romans.

The righteousness of God removes any basis for boasting as a people in salvation history because God has mercifully placed all peoples in accord with His redemptive plan. (The Jew/Gentile distinction is leveled by God's sovereign choosing, and the Gentile advantage of the majority is negated by Israel's past foundation, present hardening, and future salvation.) (184).

Russell's overview of how the other sections within the main body of the letter also relate to the missiological (he calls it "global") theme of Romans, is also worth further study.

5. **Justification by Faith.** In Romans, the principle of justification by faith, as Stendahl points out, is a principle of missions. Paul's basic argument in Romans 1-4 is that the righteousness of God removes any basis for boasting in salvation. This is so because

all peoples have sinned and all believers – Jew and Gentile – are mercifully justified on an equal basis. The principle of justification helps us understand how it's possible that Gentiles can “become part of God's scheme, and plan, and people” (Stendahl, 14). To see justification as a purely forensic concept is to interpret Romans through our Western cultural/legal lens (Russell, 174-79). I agree with Nils Dahl's conclusion: “‘Justification by faith’ is not in itself the theme of the letter but part of, and a criteria for, Paul's missionary theology” (1977, 82 cf. his extended discussion of this theme, 70-89).

Missionary Lessons from Romans: Applications and Implications

Our study of Romans leads us to the following practical conclusions which shed great light upon the way we do missions today. I wholeheartedly agree with Grant McClung, “Great Commission missions must continue to be informed by biblical paradigms if **exegesis** and **evangelization** are to remain wedded together” (McClung 1989, 5, his emphasis).

- 1. The Relation of Systematic Theology to Missiology.** The most systematic and theological letter of Paul was written with missions in mind and included practical plans to spread the gospel to new frontiers! We thus glean that we cannot do missions and in the process renounce theology. Good missionary practice will always arise out of a solid grasp of biblical doctrine. Theology and classical missions, focused upon reaching the unreached of our world, are always interrelated. Those attempting to do missions without the stabilizer of Scripture do

so under their own commissioning and to their own peril in practice! Likewise, those who teach systematic theology without focusing on world missions and practical steps for implementing it, teach in their own commissioning and do not really care why God gave us his Word and doctrine in the first place (Culver,159-60)!

2. Whole-Bible Basis of Missions. We learn from Paul in Romans 15 that the Old Testament is vital to establish a solid biblical basis for global missions. This is confirmed by a thorough search of all the apostolic sayings and sermon recorded in the New Testament epistles and Acts. Surprisingly, not once do the apostles quote the “Great Commission” as given by the Risen Christ in the Gospel accounts. But repeatedly, we discover, they go back to the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:3) and subsequent prophetic passages to justify their mission to Gentile peoples (see Acts 13:46-49 cf. Isa. 49:6; Acts 10:42-43; 15:13-21 cf. Isa. 61:4; Psa. 22:27-28; etc.). They are evidently following the example of Christ Himself (Luke 24:43-49). We must restudy the Old Testament. There we find God’s global purpose, priority, and passion; there we shall find God’s plan to use His people to “tell of His glory among the nations” (Ps. 96:3).

3. Reaching Individuals vs. Reaching People Groups. Paul’s missionary practice seems to have been governed by a desire to reach every “*ethne*”, i.e. nation or people group. His repeated use of *ethne* in Romans (29 times – 10 in chapter 15 alone!) indicates that. As we have seen Paul’s key missiological texts bind together the epistolary frame – (1:5; 15:18; 16:26) all clearly state that his final vocational goal is to bring the *ethne* to the obedience of faith in Christ. Paul’s aim was evidently not to

win as many Gentile individuals as possible but to reach as many “nations” or people groups as possible (15:18-21). If his concept of missions were to be merely winning more and more individual people to Christ he would have stayed longer in the huge and needy area between Jerusalem and Illyricum. We gather then that the Apostle’s focus was not primarily upon geographic area but upon reaching more and more peoples or nations. This is what gripped his soul! And we gather from his constant use of Old Testament scriptures (eb. 15:8-12) this concept of the missionary task came primarily from Paul’s rich understanding of the “prophetic vision of hope” (Piper) Paul understood from the Abrahamic covenant that Jehovah’s purpose, plan, and passion was to “bless” all the peoples, all the families and “nations” of earth (Gen. 12:1-3 cf. Gal. 3:8, etc.). Paul understood from his study of the Old Testament that the Lord of the Harvest desires above all else to be praised and worshipped by all the earth’s peoples (Romans 15:11). And he knew that his own missionary calling and commission was not just to reach individuals but to “carry [Christ’s] name before the *nations* (*ethon*) and kings” (Acts 9:15 cf. Rom. 1:5).

- 4. Missions vs. Evangelism.** Implicit in Paul’s comments about his missionary task being “fulfilled” or completed in the Eastern Mediterranean (vs. 19,23) is the reality he left co-laborers (trained “national” pastors and workers) in those regions to “mop up” and continue evangelizing out of the congregations Paul has established. Thus we see that the task of evangelism is not the same as missions. Missions is the initial (pioneer) work of planting an indigenous church in every people group (or biblical *ethne*). I agree with Piper (211). “Missions is what moved Paul away from the

peoples of Asia Minor and Greece (even those that were still unconverted!), and pressed him toward the unreached peoples of Spain (Romans 15:24,28).” The New Testament Pauline model is clear: once the missionary task is completed, a “reached” people group must continue being evangelized by those believers of that culture/group. This is seen, for example from Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. Once he had finished his apostolic (missionary) task among the Ephesians he nevertheless left Timothy there and instructed him to “do the work of an evangelist” (II Tim. 4:5). Paul knew that his calling was different – his specific missionary task was to plant a viable growing church which would then be responsible and able to go on with the unfinished task of evangelism (cf. I Cor. 3:6-10).

This is a valid distinction which must be maintained. Both missions and evangelism are Great Commission activities and both are needed. But to confuse the two will only lead to diminished zeal and commitment to the initial pioneering task! Evangelism is mono-cultural: working among your own people group; missions, for the most part, is cross-cultural; working in another people group than your own. By definition, a missionary is a “sent one”. He is sent out from his own to another (unreached) people group – normally crossing barriers of culture or race or geography to bring Christ to areas where He is unknown, unnamed and thus not worshipped (Rom. 15:20)!

5. Reached vs. Unreached. Again we infer from Paul’s statement in Rom. 15:19,23 that he had some idea of when a people or region was “reached.” We gather from Paul’s purpose and plan to move on to Spain that in at least some sense he saw people as reached when/if the gospel message had been proclaimed so that an

understandable testimony was left (cf. Matt. 24:14; Luke 24:47). From the model of Paul and the other apostles we learn that the issue is not so much response as *access* to the gospel. Do a people now have the *opportunity* to hear of Christ and respond? Has a strong growing church with local leadership been established so that the gospel will continue to be heard among that people? Thus a group should be seen as reached when mission efforts have established an indigenous church that has the strength and resources to evangelize the rest of the group" (Piper, 209).

6. The Objective of Missions. It follows from both Paul's statements and example (cf. Acts 14:21-23) that, in the end, the task of missions is primarily one of discipleship evangelism that leads to church planting. Proclamation is not enough. In this sense, the missions mandate clearly *does* include a response. Our goal must be to "make disciples." The missionary task is not done, the objective is not realized, until at least some individuals in a people group are becoming disciples attached to a local body of believers. The Great Commission itself seems to require that: disciples that are "made" are to be "baptized" and further "taught to obey all things" - and that requires a local church if there is none! The discipling task of missions involves evangelizing, baptizing, and congregationalizing! For Paul the Great Commission mandate meant founding new communities of believers in pioneer areas.

Conversion meant incorporation. Baptism meant identification with the Body and a body of Christ. Evangelism always had an ecclesiological intention. Churches were to be founded but then they were to be nurtured and established in the faith. This is why Paul would go back to already planted congregations and saw no inconsistency

to come and minister to the Roman Church! Significantly, Paul's proposed edificational and "fruit" enhancing ministry at Rome is presented in Romans 1 and 15 in terms of his missionary vocation. So Paul saw his mission not simply as broadcasting seed but cultivating seedlings into sturdy (individual and corporate) plants! (cf. Paul Bowers, 185-198). How vital it is in our day for missionaries to have this same clear-cut biblical objective!

- 7. Missionary Roles.** Romans serves as a model missionary treatise from the pen of a veteran missionary. L. Grant McClung points out that when we look at the entire epistle – chapters 1-16 – “nine specific roles or self-portraits of Paul emerge:” servant (1:1); called apostle (1:1); separated (1:1); debtor (1:14-16); intercessor (9:1-3; 10:1); minister/priest (15:16); pioneer (15:19-21; 23-24); peacemaker/mediator (15:25-28,31); brother/companion (7:4; 12:1;15:14). As a cross-cultural missionary primarily to urban areas, Paul's comprehensive self-image and example has much to teach us as modern missionaries. McClung's suggested application of each of these nine roles is well worth contemplation as well as emulation (1989, 5-8).
- 8. Racism an Obstacle to Missions.** As already briefly noted Jewish ethnocentrism and Gentile pride were polarizing the church at Rome. Paul recognized that this festering Jew/Gentile racial problem would keep the congregation from working together as well as in partnership with him to advance the gospel. Thus racial reconciliation rooted in redemption and revelation is a major sub-theme of the epistle. Times have not changed. Today perhaps the greatest impediment keeping Christians from partnering together in gospel advance is the lingering sore of racism

within the Body of Christ. The early church clearly struggled with this issue – it precipitated the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29 cf. 6:1-6; 10:1 - 11:18). The epistle to Rome has much to teach us. When so much of the plea for ethnic unity in our day seems to be rather shallow and, at times, mere empty rhetoric, we need to heed Paul’s example and realize the best antidote for racism is solid truly biblical theology which leads to a compassionate concern for all peoples! Because of our oneness in Christ we must humbly work together in the church to achieve God’s desired global proclamation to all peoples! Because of our oneness in Christ we must humbly work together in the church to achieve God’s desired global proclamation to all peoples! Romans teaches us that the progress of the gospel must include Jerusalem, Rome **and** Spain – and both Jew and Gentile are to be partnering together to reach all three target audiences!

9. **Strategic Planning.** In Romans we see the appropriateness of missionaries making long-range and short-term plans. Romans 1 and 15 show how that Paul did. Garry Friesen has developed a model of decision-making and biblical guidance based upon observation of Paul’s strategic planning in Romans (1980, 234-39). He concludes:

Because he responded properly to God’s guidance in its various forms, Paul became a model of one who engaged in *long-term planning* on the one hand, and *snatched up present opportunities* on the other. Interruptions became occasions for personal growth and ministry. It is just such a balance that believers today should seek to maintain (239).

Rather than basing our decisions in missions upon “holy hunches” and “gut feelings” (= mysticism), we would be far wiser (and more biblical!) if we would

learn from Paul's model the benefit of submitting all our human plans and priorities in prayer to the sovereign outworking of God's purposes!

10. God's Glory is Ultimate. Missions ultimately is for the glory of Christ. As John Piper remind us all, "It's goal is to reestablish the supremacy of Christ among the peoples of the world" (214). Romans 1:5 and 15:9 make this clear: we desire to induce Gentiles to the obedience of faith for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ! Like Paul, missionaries today must be ultimately motivated to do our work "*in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy*" (15:9). This also explains why he wanted the gospel to be spread to Spain. As more and more worshipers are brought to Christ more praise redounds to the glory of God! God's glory is indeed the ultimate – not man's salvation.

Thomas Schreiner has even suggested that this was Paul's ultimate purpose for writing Romans. Paul wanted a unified church to expand his mission to Spain in order to see God glorified – both in the Roman church and in Spain.

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