

God had given Paul grace and apostleship to preach and teach the gospel so that the obedience of faith would spread among the Gentiles (1:1, 5). Paul's ultimate goal in preaching the gospel was "for the sake of His name" (1:5); that is, it is that Christ would be glorified throughout the entire earth—that's what "for the sake of His name among all the Gentiles" means.

After Paul's third missionary journey, he had preached the gospel to the Gentiles throughout Syria and Asia Minor, and established churches that could carry on the task of evangelism in their own territories. Thus, Paul was ready to move to new regions to proclaim the gospel. He intended on going to Spain (Ro. 15:24). On his way he wanted to stop in Rome.

Since the church in Rome was primarily Gentile (1:6), they fit within the parameters of Paul's ministry. Therefore, he wanted to establish their faith and fulfill his mission in their lives so that Christ would be glorified through them even more. In verses 8-15 Paul shows the Romans that even though he has not yet come to visit them, he is completely devoted to building in their lives the obedience of faith.

B. Paul's Personal Commitment to Go to Rome (1:8-15)

1. His Thanksgiving for the Church (1:8)

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

Paul wants to express his commitment to the Romans by first telling them of his thankfulness for them.

Paul always seems to be grateful for fellow Christians, and all of his letters contain words of thanksgiving within the first chapter. The only exception to this was the letter to the churches in Galatia who had left the truth for "another gospel."

Paul's thankfulness is not directed toward the people, but toward God ("I thank my God") through Christ, the Mediator. Paul is aware that both salvation and fruitfulness in the Christian life is the result of the grace of God working in the believer (Ro. 12:6ff.; 1:5, 7), so he naturally *thanks God* for the believers in Rome.

Nevertheless, Paul is grateful for them. He says, "I thank God *for you all*." He is specifically grateful that their faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

The faith that was being proclaimed was faith in Christ. Faith is trusting in or leaning upon another. Therefore, God is magnified by faith because faith calls attention to God's dependability and trustworthiness. In the OT, Abraham "grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform" (Ro. 4:20-21). Faith in the abstract does not glorify God. Faith has its value when it is found in people who are fully assured that what God has promised, He is able also to accomplish.

The fact that the church in Rome had faith that was "being proclaimed throughout the whole world" glorifies Christ just as Paul's mission in "bringing about the obedience of faith . . . among all the nations *for His name's sake*" did. Christ is glorified wherever faith in Him is proclaimed

and wherever the gospel is received. So Paul is grateful that their faith in Christ was being lived out and was visible to others. Wherever he went in the Roman Empire (the known world) people were talking about it.

A lesson to learn in Paul's prayer is that Paul was quick to see the grace of God at work in the lives of others. He didn't thank them; rather, he thanked God for the grace they were exhibiting. He was careful not to deflect glory from God to men. However, at the same time he told those he was praying for what he had prayed, resulting in their encouragement as well.

2. Paul's desire to see them (1:9-10) (ESV)

1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you

1:10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

When Paul speaks about praying for them "unceasingly" and "always" he wants the church to know that he is not just using pious platitudes, but he means what he says. This is why he calls upon God to be his witness. God is the only one who can see the heart and Paul wants the readers to know that he is not overstating the intense concern he has for them.

In verse 9 Paul also reveals his perspective of his ministry in the gospel. He states that he *serves* God with his spirit. The word "serve" was used more or less exclusively in the Greek translation of the OT in reference to worship or to the spiritual service of the priests in the temple (TDNT IV, 61; cf 15: 16). Paul didn't view his ministry in the gospel as simply laboring for God; he saw it as an act of worship. Serving God *in spirit* reminds us of Jesus' comment in John 4:24: "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Paul's prayer included a number of components that should also characterize our prayers. First, his prayer expressed a deep love for fellow believers. This is reflected in the amount of prayer he offered on their behalf. Furthermore, Paul prayed for people well beyond those with whom he had daily contact. He had not yet visited the church in Rome when this letter was written, but he rejoiced in their faith, prayed for them without ceasing, and even knew twenty-six of the members by name (Ro. 16)! Secondly, Paul's prayer demonstrated a submissive attitude. Though he wanted to visit the believers in Rome, his primary concern was to obey the will of God (Ro. 1:10; cf. I Jn. 5:14; Matt. 26:39). Lastly, his prayer was genuine. God was his witness (Ro. 1:9) that his concern for the church in Rome was real.

3. The Reason for Paul's Longing to go to Rome (1:11-12)

1:11 For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;

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

With "for" Paul introduces several reasons why he wants to go to Rome—(1) to share some spiritual gift (v.11), (2) to obtain fruit (v. 13), and (3) to preach the gospel (v.15).

Paul longs to visit the church *to establish the believers* in the faith. The way that he wants to establish them is by “imparting” a spiritual gift to them. The word “impart” (μεταδίδομι – *metadidomi*) is better translated as “share” (cf. Lk. 3:11; Eph. 4:28; Moo, 60). Paul was not saying that he could personally convey spiritual gifts to believers, for in 1 Corinthians he is clear that spiritual gifts are supernatural endowments *given by God* for the building up of the body of Christ (I Cor. 12-14; Ro. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:7-16; I Pet. 4:10-11). He says that *the Holy Spirit gives gifts* “to each one individually just as *He wills*” (1 Cor. 12:11). Paul wasn’t going to distribute spiritual gifts to those at the church in Rome; he was going to share the gift God had given to him to help establish the believers in their faith (cf. I Thess. 3:2). In other words, the gift relates directly to the purpose of the letter (Schreiner, 54). Perhaps he was thinking of his apostolic gift that included teaching or exhortation. These would directly aid their understanding and obedience to the gospel and establish them in the faith.

Verse 12 clarifies v. 11. Lest they misunderstand, Paul is not implying that he would come and benefit them, but they had nothing to offer in return. Rather, he is confident that he would be blessed by their spiritual gifts, as well. Paul sees a mutuality of spiritual gifts within the church. Although Paul is sincere, this is also an ancient rhetorical convention used to gain the good will of the readers; he doesn’t want to come across like a dictator (Moo, *Bible Backgrounds*, 11).

4. The Desire to Obtain Fruit (1:13)

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

Paul had made many attempts to visit the church in Rome, but none had been successful (cf. Ro. 15:22-23). There is no mention of satanic opposition (cf. I Thess. 2:18), so we need not assume that that was the reason behind his delay. Perhaps his workload was so heavy that leaving for Rome was untenable. It’s also possible that God could have directly forbidden him from going at that time (cf. Acts 16:6, 7, 9). In any case, it is futile to speculate about why he hadn’t made it.

Paul wanted to establish the church in their faith in order to obtain some fruit among them.

What fruit is he talking about? Generally, “fruit” refers to manifested Christian behavior in a believer (Ro. 6:21, 22; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11; cf. Matt 7:20), the good deeds and character that come from the Christian life.

Contextually, it seems that the fruit is related to the preaching of the gospel. The “thus” at the beginning of verse 15 ties what he says here to the specific situation in Rome. That is, the reason why he is eager to preach the gospel (v. 15) is because he wants to obtain fruit (v. 13). Or, to put it in Paul’s order, “I want to obtain fruit among you as I did among the other Gentiles (v.13), that is why (thus, so) I am eager to preach the gospel to you” (v. 15). So, “the fruit” is the product of Paul’s apostolic labors in preaching the gospel. It’s his desire to see his ministry produce something good (Christian character and actions) in the lives of the believers in Rome.

5. His Debt (1:14)

1:14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

In verse 9 Paul described his ministry as service (worship). Here, he calls it indebtedness. He is obligated (i.e. he is indebted) as an apostle to preach the gospel to the Gentiles to bring about the obedience of faith. It's an obligation created by the command of the risen Christ. But it is not an obligation to God—it is an obligation to men. Paul could not pay anything back *to God* because all he had received was by grace. However, as a recipient of grace he was obligated to humanity (I Cor. 9:16b).

“Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish” classify humanity by different criteria.

“Barbarians” was a word that originally referred to those who spoke languages other than Greek. Over time, however, because Greece excelled other nations in culture, “barbarian” became a term for the rude and uncultured. What Paul means is that he is indebted to all classes of people, both the cultured and the uncultured. There is no sense of reproach. “Greeks and barbarians” is equivalent to “Gentiles” in Romans 1:13.

The “wise and foolish” simply stress categories of how men see themselves. In 1:22 the “wise” are those who are wise in their own eyes. Perhaps Paul is distinguishing between those who thought that they were intellectual and those who did not. Whatever the specific nuances he may have intended, his point is that no class of men fell outside of his obligation to preach the gospel.

6. His Readiness (1:15)

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

“Thus” is the signal that verse 15 is telling us how Paul is intending to establish the believers (v. 11) and how fruit will be obtained (v. 13); it is through the preaching of the gospel.

In Romans 1:6-7 Paul addressed those in the church as those “called of Jesus Christ, beloved of God, called as saints.” Why would Paul want to preach the gospel to people who were already saved?

The answer is that the preaching of the gospel includes more than the proclamation of the message of salvation and the initial act of faith. It also includes the instruction necessary to bring about maturity in the faith (Ro. 16:26). Paul hadn't been to Rome or participated in leading those in Rome to Christ, but he *could* contribute to their faith by instructing them. It appears from Romans that both the laying of the foundation and building upon it were considered “preaching the gospel.” In Romans 15:16-18 Paul saw himself as “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God.” There he describes the result of his labor as “the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed.” Paul's instruction, therefore, probably included doctrinal and practical theology.