

“Church on a Mission” (Romans 1:8–15)

In 1903, a group of seventeen men got together to form a small political organization. By 1917, this organization of seventeen men had grown to 40,000 members and had become powerful enough to overthrow Czar Russia. Hammer & Sickle began to make its way across our world. And before the Iron Curtain fell, communism dominated up to two-thirds of the globe. In spite of our aversion to communism, we still must ask ourselves how seventeen men could possibly have made such an amazing impact upon the world in as few as seventy or eighty years. I believe the answer is simple: The men who founded the Communist Party were committed to impacting their world. They had no plan B. They were sold-out. Nothing was going to deter them in their cause.

Today, I must ask you a very important question: Are you a person who longs to impact your world? Think about that question for a moment. Is there something within you that yearns to join a cause that makes a difference in this life and reverberates throughout eternity? Are you tired of going through the motions at church? Do you feel restless in your occupation? Is there something within you that senses there must be something more to life? I'm convinced that the Lord is looking for a few good men and women who yearn to make an impact.¹ If you are teachable, available, and faithful God will use you in a powerful way. *God seeks ordinary believers to join an extraordinary mission.*

Rom 1:8–15 explains how we can join a mission that will change the world.² In these eight verses, we'll see how to make a spiritual impact like Paul. Moreover, we'll gain a better understanding of how we can serve on an impact team—a team such as the one Paul writes to in Rome. In 1:1–7 we looked at Paul's greeting; now in 1:8–15 we will study his thanksgiving and prayer.³ Paul provides three evidences of a church on mission.

1. A church on mission is thankful (1:8–10).⁴ One of the greatest indications of Christian faithfulness is thankfulness, particularly for other believers. Paul made a practice of beginning his letters with (1) a word of thanks to God, (2) a specific prayer, and (3) a personal message to those who would read his letters. In ten of his thirteen letters, Paul states that it is his relationship with others that actually causes him to be thankful. This repeated emphasis indicates the priority he placed upon thanking God for other believers. In 1:8a he writes, **“First, I thank my⁵ God through Jesus Christ for you all.”** The word “first” (*protos*) is not followed here by the word “second,” for in this reference the word “first” implies importance rather than the beginning of a list.⁶ The verb translated “I thank” (*eucharisto*) is in the present tense and can be rendered: “I continually thank” or “I thank God over and over!” It is quite obvious that Paul loved his fellow believers. His gratitude to God is expressed “through Jesus Christ.” He understood that Christ's work on the cross brought believers into union with each other.

Why is Paul so thankful? In 1:8b he gives the reason: **“because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.”**⁷ Notice what Paul doesn't say. “Your drop dead preacher is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” “Your killer worship team is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” “Your unprecedented church growth is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” “Your cutting edge programs are being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” “Your glorious building is being celebrated is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” These are the types of statements that you might hear about a “successful” church today. We can be an arrogant, consumer-oriented people. Paul, however, has a very different perspective than many contemporary believers. He is not commending the Romans for superficial things. He indicates that their “faith” was being reported all around the world. He is not referring to the fact of their faith; he is speaking of the *nature* of their faith.⁸ In a sin-saturated society these Roman believers progressively grew to maturity in their faith. In just a few years some of these believers would be thrown to the lions in the coliseum. Some would even be dipped in wax and lit on fire by the satanic Emperor Nero. These believers were disciples indeed. They were consistent and reflected the

nature and character of Christ in their lives.⁹ Hence, Paul could affirm them for the quality of their faith. The verb translated “proclaimed” (*katangelo*) is a very strong verb that could just as easily be translated “advertised.” These believers were living advertisements for Jesus. They were on-fire! Stop for just a moment and let this fact sink in. The Roman Empire was desperately dark . . . sin abounded! No one would expect a church to thrive in Rome, the capital of the pagan world. Yet the house churches in Rome stood out as a living light in a dark world. The fervent faith of these believers was so contrary to the societal norm of their day that all who observed them couldn’t help spreading the word about them.¹⁰ The same is true in the community we live in. No one expects a church in Thurston County to stand out and make a mark. Our culture assumes that they can dominate us and intimidate us. In many cases, this is exactly what has transpired. Consequently, there’s really no cultural pressure on us. It is assumed that the church is irrelevant. We are a non-factor. So we’ve got nothing to lose! We need to grow in our faith and trust that it will be proclaimed throughout the world. What is the Christian community saying about us? What are unbelievers in Thurston County saying about us? Do they recognize our faith and our faithfulness? What do people hear about us? Let’s give our county something to talk about!

It is also worth noting what Paul meant by the use of the phrase “the whole world.” In the New Testament, that phrase normally refers to the Roman Empire.¹¹ Since Rome was the capital city, it seems reasonable to suggest that the faith of the Roman church was being proclaimed throughout the whole empire, not the “whole world” as we know it today. Obviously, the whole world couldn’t include the still undiscovered Western Hemisphere, nor would it indicate the Far East. But with the increase of technology, we have the opportunity to literally impact the entire world (e.g., video, Internet, Facebook, etc.). The key is: Let’s seek to impact our world with what really matters—our faith in the Lord Jesus. Word spreads quickly about growth, new facilities, innovative programs, but what about faith?¹² God receives the most glory from the world when our lives point to Him. *God seeks ordinary believers to join an extraordinary mission.*

How can we follow Paul’s example and effectively express thanks for our fellow believers? In 1:9–10, Paul expresses thanks through prayer to God. He writes, **“For God, whom I serve¹³ in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel¹⁴ of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.”¹⁵** Surprisingly, the key phrase in these verses is: “God is my witness.”¹⁶ This phrase is moved to the front of the Greek sentence in 1:9. In the Greek New Testament words were often moved about in the sentence structure for the purpose of emphasis. Thus, placing “witness” (*martus*) as the first word in his Greek sentence would be analogous to placing it in boldface or italics. “God is my witness” is a strong expression that Paul uses on a number of occasions. It probably represents an oath that he had taken to be faithful to pray for the church with great constancy and fervency.¹⁷ This is confirmed by the language in 1:9–10. In 1:9, the adverb translated “unceasingly” (*adialeiptos*)¹⁸ means “without letting up or leaving off.” The word suggests that there is no great length of time between prayers. His prayers were frequent and regular.¹⁹ In 1:10, Paul indicates that the Roman believers are “always” (*pantote*) in his prayers. Although praying so consistently and repeatedly may seem to be an unusual commitment for a man who didn’t personally know most of the people he was praying for, such unceasing prayer characterized Paul’s life and ministry. He was a man of great prayer. He prayed fervently for the church at Rome in the same way that he prayed for all of the other churches.²⁰ Prayer was the invisible power behind his ministry.²¹ In fact, it was Paul’s passion for prayer that ensured the success of his ministry and led to the growth and maturity of the early churches.

How can you and I take steps to grow in our prayer lives? We can write down our prayers or our prayer requests so that we will pray consistently. We can pray out loud. We can use the time we have commuting in the car for prayer. When we exercise we can devote a portion of that time to prayer. We can spend time in prayer before we go to bed and when we wake up. We can pray with our church family every Sunday morning from 8:30–9:15. We can also volunteer to pray in the overflow room during one of our worship

services. One of the keys to growing in prayer is to look for any and every opportunity to pray. Paul yearns for us to be thankful believers. He especially wants us to be thankful for one another's faith. The way that we express our thankfulness is by praying for each other. We can exude this kind of thankfulness regardless of our circumstances. Think about an Evergreen tree. An Evergreen is always green despite the changes in weather and season. It is green in the burning heat of summer; it is just as green in the icy cold of winter. In the same way, our lives are to be characterized by an enduring thankfulness that is unaffected by the changes around us. When the stressful heat of a pressured week or the deadly cold of pain strikes us, we are to stand "ever green," always grateful, regardless of the circumstances surrounding us.

[Believers on mission are thankful, but we will also discover that . . .]

2. A church on mission is focused (1:11–13).²² Paul's mission is focused on building up people. In other words, he is others-focused. Paul expresses his heart in this way: **"For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is,²³ that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.²⁴ I do not want you to be unaware,²⁵ brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far)²⁶ so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles."** In 1:11, Paul writes that he "longs" to see the believers in Rome. The verb "long" (*epipotho*) literally means "to strain." Compelled by Christ, Paul longed to visit the Roman church and he had three good reasons for such a visit. *First, Paul sought to impart spiritual benefit.* In this context, the word translated "spiritual gift" (*charisma*) means "blessing or benefit." Paul is speaking in a very wide and generic sense,²⁷ not attempting to refer to the "spiritual gifts" discussed elsewhere in the New Testament.²⁸ Are you on mission to bless and benefit your church family? What steps are you presently taking to bring this about?

The second reason that Paul longed to visit Rome was to establish believers. The verb translated "established" (*sterizo*)²⁹ in 1:11 simply means "to strengthen." This term was originally used of buildings, where it means "to be firmly fixed in place." A building with a strong foundation that is made of solid materials can stand up under pressure. Similarly, a person who has spiritual stability spends most of his time standing up spiritually. The world may knock him down, but he doesn't stay down. He isn't easily moved. People who are spiritually stable don't change their theology to conform to what they want. They know what they believe and stay with those beliefs regardless of what happens in their lives.³⁰ Paul wasn't just the greatest evangelist and church planter of all time; he was also a discipler. He understood the need for believers to be established.

Eight week ago, I severely hurt my left hand. As a result I haven't been able to lift weights. Although it is hard to tell from looking at me, prior to my injury, my strength was at an all-time high. But after a long layoff, my strength has undoubtedly diminished. I am likely as weak as a baby. Spiritually speaking, many believers assume that yesterdays spiritual workouts are enough to sustain today's spiritual strength. Nothing could be further from the truth. You can't stay strong unless you continue to workout.³¹ Likewise, we must continue to spiritually work out and challenge other believers to do the same. How will you establish someone today?

One of the ways you can establish yourself and other believers is through encouragement.³² In 1:12, Paul uses a very unusual word for "mutual encouragement" (*sumparakaleo*), one that is used nowhere else in the New Testament. This verb ought to motivate you to verbally comfort and encourage other believers. One of our top goals as believers is to encourage one another as Christ's return draws near (see Heb 10:25). Notice too that "faith" is to be the stimulus of encouragement. My faith should encourage others, and their faith should encourage me. I need encouragement, and so do you. I like to say, "Every preacher needs a preacher." One of the reasons I repeat this phrase is to remind myself of this great truth. No believer can make it alone; we need each other. Regardless of how long we have been a Christian or how active in

church we have been, we will never be so mature that we can't benefit from the spiritual input of other believers. Leaders must be humble enough to learn from others. We must learn not only to give, but also to receive.³³

Typically, the best place for mutual encouragement to occur is in small groups. When we come together for a corporate worship gathering there are certain things we can do well: We can sing worship songs to the Lord, we can listen to the Scriptures expounded, we can greet scores of believers, and we can reach out to unchurched people who come through our doors. But mutual encouragement from each other's faith happens best in smaller groups. In a small group context, we can intimately share our faith struggles and successes. We can comfort one another and bear each other's burdens. We can encourage each other to press on, and in doing so find inspiration in one another's faith. If you're not currently involved in a small group with other believers, please consider joining one today.

A third reason that Paul longed to visit Rome is found in 1:13—to bear fruit. If the church at Rome was already so fruitful, why was Paul on a quest for “fruit?” An answer to that question can be found in the fact that Paul never used the word “fruit” (*karpos*) to refer to new converts. “Fruit” is a broad term that points to the work of God in the believer.³⁴ Thus, Paul was saying that he wanted to go to Rome to be used by God to see something supernatural occur in the lives of fellow believers who lived there. This is fundamental Christianity—living life in such a way that the fruit of spiritual maturity spills over into the lives of others. Indeed, the thrust of the book of Romans is a presentation of the process of discipleship, a virtual manual on how to be “established” in the faith. When we meet with other believers, the purpose is to obtain fruit.

Sadly, one of the reasons that many individuals and churches are unfruitful is because we don't expect God to grant “much fruit” (cf. John 15:5, 8). But if (when) we expect God to bless our meager efforts, He often shows Himself in a mighty way. We must, therefore, be people of great expectation. We must have confidence that whenever we meet as a church family, God desires to pour out His Spirit and accomplish far more than we can ask or think (Eph 3:20–21). May we move forward as a church of faith-filled believers, for *God seeks ordinary believers to join an extraordinary mission.*

[Paul has shared two evidences of a church on mission: A church on mission is thankful and focused. Now he shares a third and final evidence.]

3. A church on mission is eager (1:14–15).³⁵ Individual believers and churches must be thankful and focused, but it is especially critical to be eager. Apart from a passionate zeal, our mission falls flat. Paul puts it like this: **“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,³⁶ both to the wise and to the foolish. So,³⁷ for my part, I am eager³⁸ to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome”** (1:14–15). The phrase “I am under obligation” is placed at the very end of the sentence for emphasis; the entire sentence builds up to this startling statement. The word translated “obligation” (*opheiletēs*) refers to someone who is a debtor.³⁹ Paul recognized that he had been bought with a price; therefore, he wanted to glorify God in his body (1 Cor 6:20). Later in 9:16b, he exclaims, “. . . for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” Why is Paul “under obligation?” The metaphor of a monetary debt doesn't capture the urgency. It is like a city being conquered by a new king, who entrusts to the herald the proclamation of his victory and the offer of his pardon. The herald, therefore, owes it to all the citizens to tell them urgently. If he does not, they will incur the anger of the new king by not bowing the knee to him and accepting his pardon. This urgency makes Paul eager to preach the gospel.⁴⁰

After Paul's Damascus Road encounter, he was overwhelmed with a burden to share Christ with others. Paul was not an intellectual snob.⁴¹ He saw Jesus Christ as an equal opportunity Savior. So he preached Christ to every language (Greek or any other Gentile tongue) and culture (wise or foolish). Likewise, we

must seek out anyone and everyone—people from every “tribe, tongue, people, and nation” (Rev 5:9). Since we don’t know who God is drawing to salvation, a universal offer upholds God’s sovereign call. Furthermore, it allows our church to display a representation of the eternal state where there are people of different colors, classes, cultures, education, etc. Today, will you pray for a greater burden for those who have yet to believe the good news of Jesus? Plead with the Lord of the harvest to set your heart aflame. One question remains: How can Paul “preach the gospel” to “saints” (1:7) whose “faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world” (1:8)? These individuals are already saved and on their way to heaven. As I discussed in 1:1c, the gospel is more than merely believing in Christ and being delivered from hell. In this context, “to preach the gospel” (*euaggelizo*) means more than just initially proclaiming the Christian message, but includes providing solid “building up” of those who have made an initial response (cf. 15:20).⁴²

In the book of Romans Paul preaches an expanded and developed explication of the gospel in all of its ramifications. It is the gospel of the “righteousness of God” by faith. And it is this gospel which impacts earthly lives and determines eternal destinies!⁴³ Are you preaching this gospel to saints? Believers require both justification truth and sanctification truth to help us press on to full maturity in Christ.

Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point* is a study of how human organizations change. How does a system reach the “tipping point” whereby an organizational culture is transformed?⁴⁴ Gladwell documents that it takes no more than six children in a school to begin wearing a certain brand of sport shoe to reach the tipping point, whereby in just a few days one hundred children will begin wearing the same brand of shoe. This principle is relevant to businesses, organizations, and churches. When certain individuals step up and lead, dramatic change can occur. This can be especially true in the church. Christianity tends to be a minority movement. But when a remnant becomes emboldened and sold-out, a small group of believers can set the world on its ear. Just read the book of Acts and observe the exploits of Jesus’ eleven disciples.

Today, if you’re tired of playing it safe and are longing to fulfill God’s mission in your life and within your church family, step out in faith. God wants to lift you up and take you to a place of unprecedented health and growth. He wants to use you in a way that He never has before. All that He asks is that you humble yourself before Him and make yourself available. He will do more with your life and your church than you ever thought possible. *God seeks ordinary believers to join an extraordinary mission.*

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Scripture References

Romans 1:8–15

Romans 16:25

1 Corinthians 6:20

Galatians 2:20

Jeremiah 20:9

1 Corinthians 9:16

2 Corinthians 5:14

Study Questions

1. Am I thankful for what God is doing in and through my local church (Romans 1:8)? How do I express my gratitude? In what ways do I talk my church up in the community? How does my excitement infectiously stir up others? Have I disrespected or slandered the leadership of my church? If so, will I confess this sin and repent?
2. Do I regularly pray for my church (Romans 1:9–10)? If so, how do I go about this? What prayer practices have proven helpful? Can I share these practices/principles with my small group or others in my church? What one step can I take this week that will enable me to pray more effectively?
3. In what specific ways am I seeking to “establish” believers in their faith (Romans 1:11–12)? Who have I spiritually encouraged recently? How can I help those in my sphere of influence grow to maturity in Christ? Is there a mentor who is currently investing in me so that, I too, am growing?
4. Am I intentionally pursuing “fruit” in the lives of those in my church? (Romans 1:13)? Do I yearn to see my church become spiritually fruitful? Have I wholeheartedly bought into the vision of my church? If so, how does my sense of owning the vision impact others within the body?
5. How can the concept of being a debtor to lost people help me share the gospel more often (Romans 1:14–15)? When do I feel most passionate about lost souls? What generally stirs my heart? How can I increase my burden for those whom have yet to believe in Christ? Who can challenge me in this area?

Notes

¹ Rom 1:8–15 is applicable to Paul *and* the Roman believers. He begins by mentioning how their faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world (1:8b). He also says that he expects to minister to them and experience mutual encouragement (1:11–12).

² For a helpful article on this text, see Marty L. Reid, “A Consideration of the Function of Rom 1:8–15 in Light of Greco-Roman Rhetoric,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:2 (June 1995): 181–91. The following scholars treat 1:8–15 as a discrete unit: William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, [1895] 1971), 18–22; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 23–27; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*. WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988), 26–36.

³ Remember that Paul doesn’t know these believers personally. This is unusual for Paul, because he usually visited a city (e.g., Thessalonica or Corinth), then left to continue his travels, and later wrote a letter back to the believers in that city (i.e., 1 Thess, 1 Cor). But that’s not what Paul is doing here. Hence, he spends a great deal of time introducing himself to his Roman readers.

⁴ Paul nearly always begins his letters with thanksgiving (see 1 Cor 1:4–9; Eph 1:15–16; Phil 1:3–8; Col 1:3–8; 1 Thess 1:2–10; 2 Thess 1:3–10; 1 Tim 1:12–17; 2 Tim 1:3–5; Phlm 4–5). Galatians is the only exception. It is fairly common for Paul to give thanks for the faith of his readers (Eph 1:15–16; Col 1:3–4; 1 Thess 1:2–3; 2 Thess 1:3; Phlm 4–5).

⁵ Other than the Lord Jesus at the time He spoke from the cross, Paul is the only other person in the NT who speaks of God as “my God” (2 Cor 12:21; Phil 1:3; 4:19; Phlm 4). The addition of the pronoun “my” (*mou*) draws our attention to the intensely personal relationship Paul had with God. Obviously, Paul was not some crusty, bookish theologian; he was a lover of God. To Paul, the Lord was not some distant abstraction to be worshipped from afar; He was close and personal—his Father and his friend.

⁶ Cf. Rom 1:16; 2:9–10; 3:2. J. B. Phillips translates *protos* (“first”) as “I must begin.” Mounce writes, “People reveal by their priorities what is genuinely important in their lives.” Robert Mounce, *Romans*. NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 65.

⁷ Rom 16:19 makes allusion to the same truth.

⁸ See also Harold W. Hoehner, “Romans” in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2006), 128. *Contra* Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 57.

⁹ Bruce Goettsche, “Characteristics of Faithfulness” (Rom 1:8–15): www.unionchurch.com/archive/050204.html.

¹⁰ Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 27.

¹¹ Matthew Black, *Romans*. NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 40.

¹² Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 27.

¹³ The verb translated “serve” (*latreuo*) is rendered “worship” in Phil 3:3. In the LXX this same word is used to refer to priestly service and worship. Although the word is not used here to convey the idea of priestly service, it definitely evokes worship imagery. Indeed, Paul’s service is worship. Thus, there is a very important spiritual principle here: service is worship. When we serve the Lord, every act of service is truly an act of worship.

¹⁴ Schreiner rightly concludes: “The gospel includes every aspect of Christian existence, for Phil. 1:27 calls on believers ‘to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.’ Paul’s intention in Rome was not merely to win converts but to strengthen and edify those who were already believers in Rome.” Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 53–54.

¹⁵ Mounce aptly states: “We are reminded that the real work of the ministry is prayer. Preaching is more a result of the ministry of prayer than it is a ministry itself. A sermon that does not rise from intense and heart-searching prayer has no chance of bearing real fruit.” Mounce, *Romans*, 65.

¹⁶ See 1 Sam 12:5; Ps 89:38; Jer 42:5.

¹⁷ See 2 Cor 11:23; Gal 1:20; Phil 1:8; 1 Thess 2:5, 10. This oath is not the frivolous kind of oaths condemned by Jesus (Matt 5:33–37; cf. Jas 5:12), but is rather Paul’s attempt to communicate his true love (expressed through prayer on their behalf) for this largely Gentile church which he had never visited—a fact which may not have gone unnoticed by the people.

¹⁸ Cf. only other usages: 1 Thess 1:2; 2:13; 5:17.

¹⁹ P. T. O’Brien, *Introductory to Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 214; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 59.

²⁰ See Eph 1:15–19a; 3:14–19; Phil 1:3–5; Col 1:9–12.

²¹ In Rom 15:30, Paul also asked the Roman Christians to pray for him and the other apostles.

²² Some scholars see a break between Rom 1:13 and 14 because of the phrase, “I do not want you to be unaware” (1:13a). However, the close thematic relationship between 1:11–12 and 13 seem to demand that they be kept together. See O’Brien, *Introductory to Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul*, 201–2; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 56.

²³ The phrase *touto de estin* (“that is”) is only used here in the NT.

²⁴ The NIV omits the phrase “both yours and mine,” thus losing a Pauline emphasis.

²⁵ Paul uses this phrase or a similar formula in Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; and 1 Thess 4:13. Barnett, *Romans*, 34 suggests that this usually points to information that is new to the readers. However, it is more likely that Paul is emphasizing the importance of this information (see Harrison and Hagner, “Romans,” 40).

²⁶ Utley remarks, “This same phrase occurs in I Thess. 2:18 where Satan is the agent. Paul believed his life was guided by God but disrupted by Satan. Somehow both are true (cf. Job 1-2; Dan. 10). The use of this term in 15:22 implies the hindrance was Paul’s missionary work in the eastern Mediterranean area, which is not yet complete (but close).” Bob Utley, “Romans”: <http://freebiblecommentary.org/pdf/EN/VOL05.pdf>.

²⁷ Cf. 5:15; 1 Cor 7:7; 1 Pet 4:10. Black, *Romans*, 41.

²⁸ When Paul speaks of specific spiritual gifts, he uses the plural (e.g., 1 Cor 12:1, 6; 14:1). René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2005), 36; Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, “Romans” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 40. Additionally, only God can impart spiritual gifts (Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 28).

²⁹ See Rom 16:25; 1 Thess 3:2, 13; 2 Thess 2:17; 3:3.

³⁰ Doug McIntosh, “Healthy Christianity” (Rom 1:8–12): www.cornerstonebibch.org/html/Sermons/RomOne/RomOne02.pdf.

³¹ This is a key principle throughout the New Testament. Jesus recognized that “the flesh is weak” and that men and women need strengthening (Mark 14:38; Luke 22:32). James, Peter, and John also prayed for and exhorted the strengthening of believers in the churches (e.g., Jas 5:8; 1 Pet 5:10; Rev 3:2). Paul Barnett, *Romans: The Revelation of God’s Righteousness* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2003), 33 n. 26.

³² Paul’s desire to be encouraged by his readers is a notion unparalleled in his other letters. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 56.

³³ Barnett, *Romans*, 33.

³⁴ See Phil 1:21–25; see also Rom 6:21–22; 15:28; Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11; 4:17; 2 Tim 2:16. See also Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 37.

³⁵ There is no particle connecting Rom 1:13 and 14; however, there is a logical connection between these verses. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 61.

³⁶ BDAG, though, notes that this use is indicative of one who is not Hellenistic or who does not participate in Greek culture. The term “barbarian” has pejorative connotations in English; in this case it seems unlikely that Paul was intending a derogatory sense. The idea here is that Paul is obligated to use his spiritual gift for all people whether they are “civilized” (i.e. “Hellenized”) or not, whether they had been trained in rhetoric (“the wise”) or not (“the foolish”).

³⁷ The adverb *houtos* (“so”) concludes Paul’s argument in Rom 1:8–14 and allows him to draw a final inference from his previous arguments (see BDAG s.v. 1b: “with reference to what precedes”)

³⁸ It is worth noting that Paul states he is “eager” to preach the gospel to the Roman believers. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the adjective translated “eager” (*prothumos*) is used only where Jesus admonished His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane to refrain from sleep, stating that the Spirit is “willing” but the flesh is weak (Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38). The related noun *prothumia* (“eagerness”) occurs five times (Acts 17:11; 2 Cor 8:11–12, 19; 9:2).

³⁹ Paul uses the noun *opheiletes* (“obligated”) two other times in Romans: (1) Paul is not obligated to “the flesh” (8:12); and (2) the Gentile church is obligated to help the mother church in Jerusalem (15:27).

⁴⁰ Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 1* (London: Proclamation of Trust, 2009), 61.

⁴¹ Barnett, *Romans*, 35.

⁴² Barnett, *Romans*, 35–36; Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 38. As Bowers points out, “the gospel” in Paul’s letters includes “not simply an initial preaching mission but the full sequence of activities resulting in settled churches.” P. Bowers, “Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of the Pauline Mission,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987): 198. Hoehner, “Romans,” 129: “Since Paul is addressing Christians in Rome, it would indicate that he is not evangelizing but teaching the whole counsel of God, building on his initial evangelism. This is substantiated by the contents of this letter, for it is not an evangelistic tract designed to win pagans to Christ but rather a teaching document designed to strengthen believers in their faith.” *Contra Morris*, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 65, who suggests that in this context Paul writes to his readers as Romans not as Christians.

⁴³ John Sailhamer, *The NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 517.

⁴⁴ Malcolm Gladwell, *How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Hachette, UK: Back Bay, 2002).