

“Mission Ambition” (Romans 15:14–33)

On March 11, 1965, Gary Duschl of Virginia Beach, Virginia began making a chain of gum wrappers. Today, over forty–six years later, it contains over 1.6 million gum wrappers and is 68,433 feet long and growing. This length is 12.66 miles and would require the average human being about five hours to walk! It is the equivalent to 222 football fields or forty–six Empire State Buildings. Guinness’s World Records declared Gary’s chain of gum wrappers to be the longest in the world.¹ The chain took over 25,000 hours to create. Regardless of what you think about this endeavor, it is quite an astounding accomplishment! I am impressed with Gary Duschl. Can you fathom the time, energy, and skill he put into this endeavor? What astounding ambition!

What is your ambition? What do you hope to achieve with the rest of your life? Many people are consumed with work, family, money, and pleasure (not necessarily in that order). How much of what you do could be seen as a chain of gum wrappers? As a believer in Jesus Christ, you ought to be driven by an even greater ambition—one that can change world history and extend beyond the grave. Paul gives you a holy ambition to shoot for in Rom 15:14–33.² In this passage he prepares to conclude his letter.³ When biblical writers begin to wrap up their letters, people tend to tune out. However, these twenty verses answer the question: “How do I develop a mission ambition?”⁴ Paul says: *God calls you to mission possible*. Perhaps you are thinking of “Mission Impossible” and are looking for Tom Cruise to appear. But this is not a movie, this is your life—your personal mission. Paul is going to ask you to do some impossible things in this text, but the underlying implication is that with God all things are possible if you humble yourself and depend upon Him to live His supernatural life in and through you. Paul imparts three characteristics of ambitious servants.

1. Ambitious servants proclaim Christ (15:14–21). If you are saved, you are called to proclaim Christ with your lips and your life. In 15:14 Paul writes, “**And concerning you, my brethren, I⁵ myself also am convinced⁶ that you yourselves are full⁷ of goodness, filled⁸ with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.**” According to Paul, the Roman Christians excelled in three spiritual attitudes and aptitudes:⁹ (1) They were “full of goodness.”¹⁰ These believers were good spouses, parents, employees, neighbors, and Christians. They were rightly motivated and were characterized by moral excellence in their lifestyles. Do you exude this kind of “goodness?” (2) The Roman Christians were “filled with all knowledge.”¹¹ Paul uses a word that often signifies knowledge gained by learning, effort, or experience.¹² Doctrinally, these believers were well taught with no grave deficiencies in their biblical and theological knowledge. They also applied what they learned. Does your biblical IQ far surpass your AQ (application quotient)? If so, you are far better obeying what you know than continuing to add to your head knowledge. (3) They were “able also to admonish one another.”¹³ There seems to be a sequence to these three commendations. The Roman Christians’ “goodness” and “knowledge” qualified them to “admonish one another.” The word “admonish” (*noutheteo*) has to do with counseling and guiding another Christian.¹⁴ The Roman Christians challenged and instructed one another in God’s Word.¹⁵ They also cared so deeply about one another that they took the time and the risk to lovingly confront those veering off the path.¹⁶ This is a critical need in every church. Many of us fail to handle conflict the way we should. We either go into denial and avoid the confrontation altogether, face it head-on with a prideful attitude, or acknowledge the problem but shrug it off for the sake of maintaining a friendship. All three of these reactions are inappropriate. God expects you to lovingly admonish those believers who He has placed in your life. This is not a job for your pastor; it is a job for you. Often, you will be able to have a greater impact on individuals in the body than your pastor. You have unique gifts, experiences, and passions that God will use in your church. But you must step out in faith and do your part. Don’t wait for someone else. Don’t count on someone else! *God calls you to mission possible*. He will give you the strength to fulfill what He calls you to perform.

In 15:15a Paul writes, “**But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again.**”¹⁷ The apostle has written “very boldly”¹⁸ on numerous points: (1) the Gentiles that have not heard the gospel are condemned; (2) just being moral will not get a person to heaven; (3) a person is justified by faith without any good works; (4) through one single person sin came into the world; (5) where sin increased, grace increased even more; (6) we died to the law and are no longer under the law; (7) nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus; and (8) God will keep His promises to Israel despite their faithlessness.¹⁹ Paul does not pull the punch—he makes it plain. His purpose is to “remind” his readers of what they know.²⁰ He uses a word that literally means “to over remind” (*epanamimnesko*).²¹

Why do we need to be reminded of basic truth? (1) *We are forgetful.* As we age it is amazing how our memory can fade. Now that I am forty I am becoming a bit of an authority on this subject. Hence, we all need to be reminded of the truth we have known. (2) *We are easily distracted.* Marriage, family, work, church, and our own personal pursuits can often crowd out our learning. Thus, we need to regularly return to our theological moorings and regain our focus. (3) *We think we know more than we do.* One of the grave dangers of being involved in a Bible church is that it is easy to get puffed up like a spiritual blowfish and assume that we have a grasp on various theological concepts, when in reality, we don’t. Every believer can benefit from going over the fundamentals. After all, the vast majority of biblical interpretation is not profound; it is straightforward.²² As Mark Twain said, “Most people are bothered by those Scripture passages which they cannot understand. But for me, the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand.” Our great need is to be regularly reminded of what we know; then, we must be challenged to obey!²³ Are you grounded in the fundamentals of the faith? Are you prepared to go back to the basics? Are you willing to obey what you know? *God calls you to mission possible.*

Paul now explains why he can speak such forceful and repetitious words to the Roman believers. He declares: “. . . because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest²⁴ the gospel of God, so that my offering²⁵ of the Gentiles may become acceptable,²⁶ sanctified²⁷ by the Holy Spirit” (15:15b–16).²⁸ God gave Paul “grace” (*charis*)²⁹ to minister. Grace is simply God giving to us what we don’t deserve. Paul’s calling and ministry as an apostle are founded upon grace. If you underline in your Bible, underline the words “minister” (*leitourgos*),³⁰ “ministering as a priest” (*hierourgeo*), and “offering” (*prosphora*) in 15:16. These are all technical Greek words that are used to describe the Jewish priests who offered animal sacrifices in the Jewish temple.³¹ Paul uses these terms drawn from temple worship in Judaism to describe his own apostolic ministry. Instead of being a temple priest, Paul is a minister of Jesus; and, instead of being in the Jerusalem temple, Paul serves on the frontiers of the Roman Empire. Instead of having a priestly duty to bring animal sacrifices as an offering, Paul’s priestly duty is to share the good news about Jesus with Gentiles.

Two significant principles stem from this verse: (1) *Ministry is a gracious privilege.* Admittedly, it is daunting at times. It is easy to feel taken for granted and unappreciated. This can lead to the fleshly response, “My church is lucky to have me!” Yet, the reality is, “I am fortunate to serve my church.” Ministering to others is a privilege! Do you see your opportunity to minister as a privilege or a burden? When you have served in a ministry for an extended period of time, it is easy to grow weary and disillusioned. Pray this week for a greater awareness of the privilege of ministry. (2) *The gospel is a precious responsibility.* A priest handled an offering very carefully in order to keep it holy; we must handle the gospel just as carefully.³² You must see yourself as a spiritual heart surgeon who is dealing with matters of eternal life and death. How well do you know the gospel of Jesus Christ? Have you mastered its contents? *God calls you to mission possible.*

Verses 17–21 describe the priorities and principles that shaped Paul’s ministry up to the time of his writing and explain his absence in the past. In 15:17–18a he writes, **“Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting³³ in things pertaining to God.³⁴ For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.”³⁵** Paul states that he boasts (lit. “glories”) in “things pertaining to God.”³⁶ Now keep in mind: no one hated boasting more than Paul.³⁷ But when it came to boasting in what Christ had done *through* him, Paul could brag with the best of them! He does not say, “I boast about what I have done through Christ,” as if he were the subject and Christ merely the instrument. Rather, he says, “I boast about what Christ has done through me!” Paul is merely a tool, an instrument, a vessel for the work of Christ.³⁸

This morning on the way into church I noticed a sandwich board at a newly opened sports bar. It read, “Prime rib served on Friday and Saturday nights.” When I saw this sign I got excited because prime rib is one of my wife’s favorite meals. I immediately imagined taking my wife to this establishment and having the waitress place the prime rib in front of us. I imagined the knife and fork standing to attention on the plate, doing a little dance, and bragging about the prime rib. Obviously, this is absurd because the knife and fork did nothing to make the prime rib delicious. The knife and a fork are simply instruments used to eat the meal. Similarly, we are merely the instruments in which the grace of God operates.³⁹ It is so easy to take credit for our own ministry accomplishments. Sometimes we are not even cognizant that we are doing it. We must deliberately choose not to rob God of any of His glory. This means we must consciously seek to be out of step with our culture. Today heroes in sports, entertainment, and politics promote themselves and their own agendas, yet as believers we are to be absolutely dependent upon Christ. *God calls you to mission possible.*

There are many reasons why Paul depended upon Christ so much. One reason was the sheer immensity of the task that God called him to.⁴⁰ God-sized tasks typically bring about great humility. Paul explains that his ministry resulted in **“. . . the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,⁴¹ in the power of signs and wonders,⁴² in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached⁴³ the gospel of Christ. And thus I aspired to preach the gospel,⁴⁴ not where Christ was already named,⁴⁵ so that I would not build on another man’s foundation;⁴⁶ but as it is written, ‘THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND’”⁴⁷** (15:18b–21). God did great things in and through Paul whose specific burden was to preach to those who had never heard. He pictured the region from the city of Jerusalem to the city of Illyricum as being like a big circle. (Presently, Jerusalem is in modern-day Israel, and Illyricum is in what used to be Yugoslavia, modern-day Croatia, Bosnia, and Albania.) Within this circle Paul planted about a dozen Christian churches in key cities. His strategy was to plant a church in a prominent city, and then empower church leaders to fan out into the smaller towns and villages. In this passage Paul was not saying that there were no longer any non-Christians in this circle, but he felt he was laying the foundation for the churches as he proclaimed God’s good news in this entire area.⁴⁸

Paul’s heart would be for us to follow in his sandals and focus on those who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. This means that churches should be forming churches where there are no churches. We must be committed to praying for world evangelization, particularly in the 10/40 window.⁴⁹ We must seek to plant churches throughout the world including our own county. We may even be called to offer our lives in the service of world missions. History has told us that the lieutenants in Napoleon’s army carried in their jackets, close to their hearts, a map of the world. What Napoleon was trying to communicate to his men was world conquest! Wherever they went, they had that map close to their heart. Their vision was world domination. The same is true for the disciple of Jesus Christ. Our cry must be, “God give us a passion for souls.” Ralph Waldo Emerson said it well: “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”⁵⁰

[Not only do ambitious servants proclaim Christ, but . . .]

2. Ambitious servants make plans (15:22–29). It is good to make plans and then hold them loosely. God has ways of redirecting our paths. Paul writes: **“For this reason I have often been prevented⁵¹ from coming to you; but now,⁵² with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.⁵³ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution⁵⁴ for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.⁵⁵ Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. 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. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ”** (15:22–29).⁵⁶ Opposition and closed doors are not a sign of God’s disapproval. Rather, God can powerfully work through such circumstances.⁵⁷ When Harold MacMillan was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, he was asked what represented the greatest challenge for a statesman. Famously, he replied, “Events, my dear boy, events.” Life has a way of catching us by surprise. We make our plans—and we ought to plan carefully for the future—but our plans do not equal God’s will. Events *will* intervene.⁵⁸

Perhaps you had plans for your life, which you thought were God’s will that did not come to fruition. You may have been engaged to the person you had waited your entire life for only to see the relationship break up. Maybe you are a married woman who has longed for a child of your own, but now you and your husband have been unable to conceive. You may have asked, “God why are you depriving me of being a mom? Do you think I am unfit for the task?” Perhaps you have prepared yourself for ministry and find yourself unable to get a job. It seems like every time you apply you are rejected. You may be wrestling with resentment, “God, I have spent thousands of dollars on Bible college. I’ve tried to honor you with my life, and I feel like the well has run dry. What am I supposed to do?” Often, what has appeared as setbacks, God can use to promote us to the next level of Christian growth and character.

The apostle is also concerned that the Roman Christians give to the church at Jerusalem. The word “helped”⁵⁹ refers to a generous financial gift. The phrase “serving” (*diakoneo*) is often used in connection with raising money.⁶⁰ Apparently, many of the people who had turned from Judaism to Christ had lost their jobs and been ostracized from their families. Paul reminded the Gentile believers that salvation came through Israel, and told them that they had a moral obligation to help these Jewish believers who were enduring hardship because of their faith in Christ. Hence, the rich should help the poor; the strong should help the weak. Paul also emphasized two other terms: “pleased” (15:26, 27) and “indebted” (15:27). His point is that sacrificial giving is a debt and a pleasure. How can these both be true at the same time? If you are a parent, you are under obligation to care for your children. If you do not care for your children, the State will remove them from your care. Yet, you likely also find pleasure in parenting (at least most of the time). If you are a parent, this great responsibility is both an obligation and a pleasure. Of course, the more you grow in Christ and spend time with your children the more pleasure you will discover in your parenting. Likewise, you are under obligation to give, but the more you grow in Christ and the more you get to know those in need the more pleasure arises in giving.⁶¹ Will you give sacrificially to those who need your financial assistance? Remember, you don’t own your wealth—you owe it. But there is great pleasure in giving generously to those in need. Perhaps in addition to giving cheerfully and generously to your local church, God is calling you to give to our persecuted brothers and sisters throughout the world.⁶² If so, do it today.

[Ambitious servants proclaim Christ and make plans. The third and final characteristic of ambitious servants is . . .]

3. Ambitious servants solicit prayer (15:30–33). The quickest way to get on mission and recognize “Mission Possible” is to pray and to ask others to pray for you. In 15:30 Paul writes: “**Now I⁶³ urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit,⁶⁴ to strive together⁶⁵ with me in your prayers to God for me.**”⁶⁶ In Rom 1 Paul assured the Christians at Rome of his prayer support, now he turns to them and asks them to return the favor. In praying, they are actually participating with Paul in his ministry; they are, in Paul’s words, “striving together with him” (*sunagonizomai*). The word-group *agonizomai* is often associated with the strenuous discipline of the athlete who struggles to prevail, such as contestants wrestling in the Greek games.⁶⁷ It is a Greek word from which our English word “agonize” comes from. Clearly, Paul saw prayer as part of the Christian struggle. That is why Samuel Zwemer, ground-breaking missionary to Muslim lands, could utter his famous saying, “Prayer is the gymnasium of the school.”⁶⁸ Paul expects you to pray diligently for your leaders. If you are in leadership, there is also wisdom in recruiting a prayer shield. A prayer shield is a team of people who will pray for you in the course of your ministry. Oh, how we need prayer to fulfill our ministries and finish well!

Paul makes two specific requests in 15:31–32: (1) “**that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient⁶⁹ in Judea**” (15:31). He does not ask that they pray for the salvation of these unbelieving Jews. They have had their opportunity. Judgment now awaits them. Paul does not see this journey as an evangelistic campaign among the unbelieving Jews but as a ministry to the saints in Jerusalem (15:26). (2) Paul also prayed “**that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints**” (15:31). The Gentiles gladly gave to minister to the Jewish saints, but would the Jews gladly receive these gifts? Paul asked for prayer that they would.⁷⁰ The goal of Paul’s prayer requests is: “**so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God⁷¹ and find refreshing rest in your company**” (15:32).⁷² Thus, the “refreshing rest” (*sunanapausomai*) envisioned is not the relaxation of a hammock and a tropical drink. The refreshment stems from the fellowship and joy that exist when members of the church mutually minister to one another.⁷³ *God calls you to mission possible.*

We must keep our main focus in prayer on the main task of the gospel. We must go for Satan’s jugular in our prayers and not get distracted into majoring on minor skirmishes. I imagine Satan briefing his demons: “I am afraid we can’t stop them praying altogether. Some of them have gotten in the habit. But, let’s divert them from the jugular and get them aiming for the little toe. See if you can get them to spend all their prayer time praying about physical illness. When their circumstances are difficult, get them to focus their praying on asking that things will get easier. Don’t, whatever you do, let them pray for courage and faithfulness to Christ in their difficult circumstances. I don’t mind too much if their health returns or for their circumstances get easier; but, I mind very much if they are loyal witnesses to Christ and servants of the gospel.”⁷⁴

In our final verse of this chapter, Paul writes, “**Now the God of peace⁷⁵ be with you all. Amen**” (15:33). Paul uses the familiar term “peace” (Gk. *eirene*/Heb. *shalom*) to emphasize that his mind is preoccupied to the end with Jewish and Gentile unity.⁷⁶ Similarly, God wants us to experience true peace and harmony with other believers by tearing down any ethnic, social, and preferential barriers in the local church. *God calls you to mission possible.*

Show the video of Father Zakaria Botros as an example of how one man can make a difference.⁷⁷

A Score Card: Am I a Competent Christian?⁷⁸

Are you a competent Christian? Below you will find seven characteristics that Paul brings out in Romans 15:14–33. You can test your level of competency by taking the brief quiz that follows. Circle the number under each trait that describes your level of competency (10 meaning best, 1 meaning worst). Finally, think through the results of this evaluation, and then commit yourself to a game plan that is designed to help bring about improvement.

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Full of goodness | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Filled with all knowledge | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Able to admonish | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Grounded in the fundamentals | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Dependent upon God | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Burdened for missions | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Sacrificial in financial giving | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Passionate about prayer | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |

Copyright © 2011 Keith R. Krell. All rights reserved. All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the New American Standard Bible, C 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, and 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission. Permissions: Feel free to reproduce and distribute any articles written by Keith Krell, in part or in whole, in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. It is our desire to spread this information, not protect or restrict it.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Keith Krell, Timeless Word Ministries, 2508 State Ave NE Olympia, WA 98506, 360-352-9044, www.timelessword.com

Scripture References

Romans 15:14–33

Romans 1:10–13

Acts 20:22–25

1 Thessalonians 1:4–10

2 Corinthians 5:18–20

Philippians 1:19–26

Colossians 1:25–29

Study Questions

1. What methods do I use in my personal life to remind myself of the truths of Christianity (Romans 15:15)? Do I study my Bible daily for the purposes of confirming what I believe? How can I strive to master the fundamentals and encourage others to get back to the basics?
2. What grace has God given me (Romans 15:15–16)? What do I “glory” in? Do I ever take credit for what Christ does through me? How can I intentionally cultivate greater humility? How can I faithfully serve God and preach Christ where I am (15:17–21)? Who has God put in my life that needs to trust in Christ or grow in Christ?
3. What was Paul’s ambition (Romans 15:19–20)? How does his example challenge me? What is my life’s greatest ambition? How does it stack up with Paul’s? What sort of ambitions do I have, especially when I think about Christian service? Do I have a passion to fulfill the gospel?
4. In what ways do I express the sort of gospel partnerships that Paul engaged in (Romans 15:25–29)? To whom am I indebted spiritually? What have I done to acknowledge my “indebtedness” to the persons who somehow invested spiritually in me?
5. Why is prayer such a struggle (Romans 15:30–33)? What types of prayers do I ask people to pray for me? How often do I solicit the prayers of other believers? What do I do to persevere in prayer? How can I help and encourage other believers in this great pursuit?

Notes

¹ See www.gumwrapper.com; accessed 19 August 2011.

² Paul arranges this passage into his previous work (15:14–21), his present ministry (15:22–29), and his future plans (15:30–33). See René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield: 21st Century Press, 2005), 280. Stott offers this analysis of the closing of Romans: “. . . he wonders whether they may have been offended by the fact, contents or tone of his letter. Has he been presumptuous to address a church he did not found and has never visited? Has he given the impression that he regards their Christianity as defective and immature? Has he been too outspoken? The apostle seems to be experiencing a twinge of apprehension about how his letter will be received. If so, the rest of it will disarm and reassure them. He writes very personally (maintaining an ‘I—you’ directness throughout), affectionately (‘my brothers’, 15:14) and candidly. He opens his heart to them about the past, present and future of his ministry, he asks humbly for their prayers, and he sends them many greetings. In these ways he gives us insight into the outworking of God’s providence in his life and work.” John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 377.

³ Rom 15:14 marks a major structural break in the letter. In 15:13 Paul concluded his fully developed theology of the gospel begun in 1:16. In 15:14 he returned to the subject of 1:15—the circumstances that prompted the letter, namely, his planned visit to Rome. These concluding remarks (Rom 15:14–16:27) are the longest of any of Paul’s letters. The reasons being: (1) Paul had never visited Rome and desired to build rapport. (2) Paul planned on visiting Rome in the future and wanted to express a proper farewell. Moo succinctly notes the parallels: “The way in which the letter opening and closing ‘frame’ the body of Romans is seen all the more clearly when we note the way in which the contents of 15:14-33 match those of 1:1-15, and especially 1:8-15.”

| | | |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Commendation of the Romans | 15:14 | 1:8 |
| “Apostle to the Gentiles” | 15:15b-21 | 1:3, 13 |
| Hindrance in visiting Rome | 15:22 | 1:13a |
| “Indebtedness” | 15:27 | 1:14 |
| Desire to minister for mutual blessing | 15:29 | 1:11-12 |
| Prayer | 15:30-32 | 1:9-10 |

Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 885–86. See also the following chart in John Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” unpublished class notes (2010 ed.), Moody Bible Institute.

Parallels: Introduction and Conclusion

| | | |
|--|--------|----------|
| Centrality of the Gospel | 1:1,15 | 15:16 |
| Paul’s Mission to the Gentiles | 1:5 | 15:16,18 |
| Commendation of the Romans | 1:8 | 15:14 |
| Paul’s Desire to Visit Rome | 1:10 | 15:23 |
| Establishment of the Faith of the Romans | 1:11 | 15:13 |
| Hindrances to Paul’s Visit | 1:13 | 15:22 |
| Paul’s Desire to go to New Areas | 1:13 | 15:20 |

⁴ Recent studies have recognized that Rom 15:14–33 is a “highly significant passage” for a theology of missions. See Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 168; Steve Strauss, “Missions Theology in Romans 15:14–33,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:640 (Oct 2003): 457–74.

⁵ The “I” (*auto ego*) is very emphatic in Greek. Rom 15:14–33 becomes very personal in its nature (he uses “I/me” at least twenty-eight times).

⁶ The verb *pepeismai* (“I am convinced”) is the first word of the sentence for emphasis. The perfect tense speaks of a completed action with enduring results but focuses on the results and not the action.

⁷ Paul used the adjective *mestos* (“full”) at Rom 1:29 to describe the complete characterization of sinful humanity as consumed by sin. Here he uses the term in the same sense but with opposite result. His readers are so known for their goodness that they are thoroughly characterized by it.

⁸ The term “filled” (*pleroo*) occurs often in Romans (cf. 1:29; 8:4; 13:8; 15:13, 14, 19).

⁹ Schreiner insists that all three terms are deliberately general. Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 764.

¹⁰ The word translated “goodness” (*agathosune*) occurs elsewhere in the NT only in Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9; 2 Thess 1:11.

¹¹ See Jer 31:33; 1 Cor 2:16; Col 2:3, 8.

¹² E.g., Rom 2:20; 11:33; 1 Cor 12:8; 2 Cor 2:14; 4:6; 10:5; Eph 3:19; Phil 3:8; Col 2:3; 1 Tim 6:20.

¹³ The term rendered “admonish” or “warn” (*noutheteo*) is used in Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 4:14; Col 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thess 5:12, 14; 2 Thess 3:15. The noun form (*nouthesia*) is used in 1 Cor 10:11; Titus 3:10; Eph 6:4.

¹⁴ BDAG s.v. *noutheteo*: “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct.”

¹⁵ When I took a course in church growth in seminary I learned that the number one reason why churches in America are unable to grow beyond about one hundred people is because the pastor can’t trust other people to minister.

¹⁶ See Prov 27:6: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”

¹⁷ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 280–1 explains: “Since the phrase *the grace given to me* refers to Paul’s apostolic authority (cf. 12:3), one may think the other purpose for writing was to establish his apostolic authority. Yet, if he had nothing new to say what difference would that make? This phrase was not an apologetic defense of Paul’s apostleship but refers to his authority to impart information his readers knew (thereby strengthening them) and did not know (thereby informing them).” Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 889 offers this further insight: “Paul must intend his language seriously; and what he is saying is that the things he has taught them and exhorted them to do all derive from the faith that they hold in common with Paul. In his letter Paul has done nothing but to explicate, for them in their circumstances, the implications of the gospel.”

¹⁸ The adverb *tolmeroteron* (“very boldly”) only occurs here in the NT. BDAG defines the term as: “bold, daring, audacious,” and defines its use in Rom 15:15a as “rather boldly.”

¹⁹ Hart, “The Letter to the Romans.”

²⁰ I like what Deffinbaugh writes, “To the degree that we innovate, we depart from the fundamentals, which we are responsible to reiterate.” See Bob Deffinbaugh, “Paul’s Excuse” (Rom 15:14–33): www.bible.org.

²¹ Boa and Kruidenier write: “Though *epanamimnesko* is employed only here, the idea of reminding believers of the fundamentals of the faith can be found throughout the New Testament:

- 1 Corinthians 15:1–12: Paul reminds the church in Corinth of the gospel which they have believed.
- Philippians 3:1: Paul takes up matters which he had either discussed personally with the Philippian church or in an earlier letter.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15: Paul reminds the believers in Thessalonica to stand firm in the teachings they have received, either orally or by letter.
- 2 Timothy 1:13; 3:14: Timothy is exhorted to keep as a pattern what Paul has taught him.
- Hebrews 2:1: The writer admonishes his readers to pay more careful attention to what they have heard lest they ‘drift away.’
- 2 Peter 2:12–15; 3:1— Peter cites the value of perpetual reminders even to people who are established in the truth. He says both his letters are to stimulate his readers to ‘wholesome thinking.’ The great creeds of the church developed not only as a means for systematizing the faith, but for systematizing and preserving it in a way that is easy to memorize and pass from one generation to another. However, even creeds can fall into rote use, and so the Spirit-led teaching and preaching of the Word of God (the proclamation of kingdom truth) continues to be the best way for reminding the church of what it believes. Just as the New Testament epistles served as reminders when originally written, they should do so in our day as well.” Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 467–68.

²² Eaton remarks: “Why are pastors and teachers needed? Their work is one of reminding people. It is surprising to find Paul describing his famous letter as simply ‘a reminder’! But Paul’s letters are just the outlines of what he could have said at greater length. New Testament letters need expounding rather than summarizing! A Christian teacher often tells people what they already know. Afterwards they say, ‘I have always believed that but now you have helped me to see it more clearly.’ Exactly!” Michael Eaton, *Romans*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 262.

²³ See 2 Pet 1:12–15 and 3:1.

²⁴ The verb *hierourgeo* (“ministering as a priest”) appears only here in the NT. It is the verb form of the noun for “priest” (*hiereus*) and conveys the idea “to perform holy service, act as a priest with reference to something,” here with reference to the gospel of God.

²⁵ Paul may have Isa 66:18–21 in mind as he pictured the Gentiles as an offering to God. Though the prophecy in that passage will not be fulfilled until Christ returns to establish His millennial kingdom on earth, Paul may have seen his own journey to Jerusalem with representatives of his churches as a foreshadowing of that glorious gathering of the nations who will journey to Jerusalem as clean vessels and an offering to the Lord (see Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 890; Schreiner, *Romans*, 767; Strauss, “Missions Theology in Romans 15:14–33,” 460).

²⁶ See 1 Pet 2:5 for another cultic context that uses the term of “acceptable” sacrifices.

²⁷ Stott, *Romans*, 379 remarks: “Although Gentiles were rigorously excluded from the temple in Jerusalem, and were on no account permitted to share in the offering of its sacrifices, now through the gospel they themselves become a holy and acceptable offering to God. This significant development was in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that diaspora Jews (of whom Paul was one) would proclaim God’s glory in distant lands and bring people to Jerusalem from all the nations ‘as an offering to the LORD.’”

²⁸ As Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 891 says: “It is ultimately God himself, by his Holy Spirit, who ‘sanctifies’ Gentiles, turning them from unclean and sinful creatures to ‘holy’ offerings fit for the service and praise of a holy God.”

²⁹ Gk. *charis*, see Rom 1:5, 7; 3:24; 4:4, 16; 5:2, 15, 17, 20–21; 6:1, 14–15, 17; 7:25; 11:5–6; 12:3, 6, 16:20.

³⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 890 speaks of the cultic imagery and its significance: “The language of ‘priest’ and ‘sacrifice’ here is, of course, metaphorical; Paul makes no claim to be a ‘priest’ or to be offering sacrifice in any literal sense. This is made altogether clear by his reference to the Gentiles themselves as the sacrifice.”

³¹ As Stott, *Romans*, 379 notes it should not be surprising for Paul, a Jew, to see his service to Christ in terms of a cultic operation. This would have been a natural image to draw for a Jew.

³² Hart, “The Letter to the Romans.”

³³ Gk. *kauchesis*, see Rom 3:27; 1 Cor 15:31; 2 Cor 1:12; 7:4, 14; 8:24; 11:10, 17; 1 Thess 2:19; Jas 4:16. Paul uses boasting language more than any other NT writer (fifty-five of the sixty times in the NT, with forty-two of them in Romans and Corinthians), but he was never proud of himself or felt superiority (like the Jews in Rom 3:17). Rather, he was proud of what Christ had done in him (as in 15:18). See Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*. The IVP NT Commentary series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 389. *Kauchesis* here does not carry any sense of personal boast, but is best translated as “exulting” in what another has done. See I. Howard Marshall, “Should Christians Boast?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (July-Sept 2002): 266.

³⁴ The phrase *ta pros ton theon* is best translated “things pertaining to God” (Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 890; Schreiner, *Romans*, 767), as in the NASB. Translations that include something about “Paul’s service for God” (ESV, GNB, NIV, RSV), though reflecting the thought of Rom 15:18, tend to miss the point of this particular phrase where there is no reference to what Paul had done. In this phrase Paul was exulting only in what God had done. See also Strauss, “Missions Theology in Romans 15:14–33,” 461.

³⁵ See Luke 24:19; John 15:4–5; Acts 1:1; 2:23; Gal 2:20; 2 Thess 2:17.

³⁶ See 1 Cor 1:29–31; Gal 6:12–15; Phil 3:3; Col 1:18.

³⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 1:26–31; 4:7.

³⁸ Sam Storms, “Romans 15:1–16:27”: www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/151-1627; accessed 19 August 2011.

³⁹ As Moo aptly states, “Successful ministry is always God’s doing.” Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 495.

⁴⁰ Eaton, *Romans*, 265 aptly remarks: “Paul obviously loved to be first: an evangelist. He loved to be a father establishing his children. He wanted to be an establisher of churches, an apostle. And Paul is of course famous as a ‘theologian’. The greatest ‘theologian’ of all time was an evangelist, a pastor, an establisher of churches. His ‘theology’ was preached and written for the ordinary men and women to be found in the churches of the East Mediterranean. His readers included slaves and even children. He quotes Isaiah 52: ‘but even as it is written, “Those to whom it has not been announced concerning him will see, and those who have not heard will understand”’ (15:21). Most preachers who have any kind of theological gift such as Paul had, or who like to write something of substance as Paul did, will want to write for fellow ministers or for fellow scholars. Not Paul. He put preaching above writing. And he had the ordinary person in view when he preached and wrote. Would that all theologians had the same kind of heart!”

⁴¹ The phrase *hupakoēn ethnon* (“obedience of Gentiles”) echoes Rom 1:5. The “obedience” Paul has in mind is not specified here, though the parallel with the statement in 1:5 allows for some clarity. There the obedience in mind was faith; in other words, Paul sought to bring the Gentiles to faith in Christ. Here we see that Paul’s ministry leads to not only faith, but also obedience “in word and deed.” The parallels between this use and the use in 1:5 should also

highlight their differences, namely that here the obedience is described as “in word and deed” (*logo kai ergo*) while there it is described as “faith.” There Paul had a view of bringing Gentiles to know Christ as Savior, but here as Paul’s offering the Gentiles actions and speech come into play. The differences in intent in the uses become evident in the different words used to describe them in the two passages, and therefore it is best to maintain the distinctions as well as the parallels. See John P. Correia, “A Blueprint for Success” (Rom 15:14–33): unpublished sermon notes. See also Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 53 who writes: The “full dimension of Paul’s apostolic task . . . was not confined to initial evangelization but . . . included also the building up and firm establishment of churches.”

⁴² Dunn notes that the phrase “signs and wonders” was the standard OT way of referring to the miracles of the Exodus (Exod 7:3, 9; 11:9–10; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 11:3; 26:8; 29:3; Neh 9:10; Ps 78:43). James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 862. Stott, *Romans*, 381 argues: “This expression brings together the three commonest biblical terms for the supernatural. ‘Signs’ indicates their significance (especially in demonstrating the arrival of God’s kingdom), ‘powers’ their character (exhibiting God’s power over nature) and ‘wonders’ their effect (evoking people’s amazement). Paul’s only other use of these three words in relation to his ministry is in 2 Corinthians 12:12, where he calls them ‘the things that mark an apostle’ or ‘the signs of a true apostle’ (RSV). This is not to deny that God can perform miracles today, for it would be ludicrous to impose limitations on the creator of the universe. It is rather to acknowledge that their chief purpose was to authenticate the unique ministry of the apostles.”

⁴³ Though the NET and the NASB prefer the translation of “fully preached” it seems that the ESV rendering of “fulfilled the ministry” is more likely. Paul may be alluding to the fulfillment of Christ’s command in Acts 1:8 to be a witness of Him to the whole earth.

⁴⁴ Paul employs the *euangelion* word group (“gospel”) to cover the whole range of evangelistic and teaching ministry—from the initial proclamation of the gospel to the building up of believers and grounding them firmly in the faith. See W. Paul Bowers, “Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of the Pauline Mission,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (June 1987): 186; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove: Apollos/InterVarsity, 2001), 183–84.

⁴⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 896 further explains: “Paul here indicates that he believed that God had given him the ministry of establishing strategic churches in virgin gospel territory; like the early American pioneers who pulled up stakes anytime they could see the smoke from another person’s cabin, Paul felt ‘crowded’ by too many Christians.”

⁴⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 897 comments: “As he does in 1 Cor. 3:9b-15, Paul uses the metaphor of a building to describe the work of ministry. And, as that passage makes clear, Paul does not intend to say anything disparaging in general about the work of ‘building on the foundation,’ for that his commission from the risen Christ did not include these activities. To adopt Paul’s other metaphor from the same passage, he had been given the task of ‘planting’; others, like Apollos, were there to ‘water’ the fragile new growth (1 Cor. 3-5b-8).”

⁴⁷ This OT quote is taken from Isa 52:15 LXX.

⁴⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 871 explains: Paul was referring to “the strategic vision and policy sketched out in vv 19–20,” and was not claiming “to have done all that could be done, even in terms of foundation laying, in the east.”

⁴⁹ The 10/40 Window is an area of the world that contains the largest population of non-Christians in the world. The area extends from 10 degrees to 40 degrees North of the equator, and stretches from North Africa across to China. See www.1040window.org/; accessed 21 August 2011.

⁵⁰ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 322.

⁵¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 773 notes that the passive “I was prevented” (*enekoptomen*) is a divine passive; Paul was hindered by God since other work was appointed for him in the east.

⁵² Stott, *Romans*, 383 further clarifies: “In the first chapter Paul wrote that he had ‘many times’ planned to visit them, but had so far ‘been prevented’ (1:13), although he did not divulge what had stopped him. Now he does. It had to do with his mission policy. On the one hand, because he was concentrating on pioneer evangelism elsewhere, he was not free to come to them. On the other hand, because the Roman church had not been founded by him, he did not feel at liberty to come and stay.”

⁵³ This term *diakoneo* (“serving”) is often used in connection with raising money (cf. Rom 15:31; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1).

⁵⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 903 comments: “Paul suggests something of the significance of this contribution by calling it a *koinonia*, literally, a ‘fellowship.’ Here the word clearly means ‘that which is readily shared,’ ‘contribution,’ but there is certainly an allusion to the word’s common use in Paul to denote the loving intimacy of

the Christian community. As Paul makes explicit in 2 Cor. 8:4 and 9:13, the Gentile Christians' contribution to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem is an expression of this unity and intimacy."

⁵⁵ Paul planned to minister to the believers in Jerusalem by taking the contribution from Macedonia and Achaia (see 1 Cor 16:1–4 and 2 Cor 8–9). The money was not only aid from Gentile believers to Jewish believers, but also an expression of love that would unify the church even more.

⁵⁶ Most scholars agree that "the various purposes [of Romans] share a common denominator: Paul's missionary situation" (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 20–21).

⁵⁷ Paul didn't plan for things to happen as they did. However, if the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon) were written while Paul was in Rome we should be most grateful that Paul had the time to write.

⁵⁸ Ray Pritchard, "I'm Coming To Rome Someday, I Hope: Seven Reflections on Knowing the Will of God" (Rom 15:22–29): www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2007-08-25-Im-Coming-To-Rome-Someday-I-Hope-Seven-Reflections-on-Knowing-the-Will-of-God; accessed 20 August 2011.

⁵⁹ Gk. *propempe* is a technical term for missionary support (see Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; 1 Cor 16:6, 11; 2 Cor 1:16; Titus 3:13; 3 John 6). Paul is seeking more than just emotional support in these verses, as Stott, *Romans*, 385 attests: "The verb translated *assist* (*propempe*) seems already to have become almost a technical Christian term for helping missionaries on their way. It undoubtedly meant more than good wishes and a valedictory prayer. In most cases it also involved supplying them with provisions and money, and sometimes providing them as well with an escort to accompany them at least part of the way. So the dictionary definition of *propempe* is to 'help on one's journey with food, money, by arranging for companions, means of travel etc.' (BAGD). Perhaps Paul hopes to establish an ongoing relationship with the Christians in Rome, so that they will continue to support him, as other churches have done previously." See also Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 901.

⁶⁰ Cf. Rom 15:31; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1.

⁶¹ Adapted and revised from Moo, *Romans*, 497.

⁶² I would suggest contacting Voice of the Martyrs: www.persecution.com.

⁶³ Paul is intensely personal: six times in Rom 15:30–32 he uses the words "I, me, my."

⁶⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 781 states: "Believers are exhorted to pray because of their love for one another, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The emphasis, then, is not on the love that the Spirit has for believers (contra Murray 1965: 221; Piper 1979: 103), but on the love that believers have for one another, a love that has its origin in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5)."

⁶⁵ The combination of *parakalo* ("I urge you"), the authority invoked ("by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit"), and the verb *sunagonisasthai* ("to strive together") make this a very strong appeal for prayer.

⁶⁶ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked* 286–87 notes the irony of God's fulfillment of Paul's prayers: "Having entrusted all of his plans to God's will, ironically God does not answer Paul exactly how he expects: (1) Paul was rescued by the unbelieving Jews by being imprisoned for two years. (2) His collections appear to have been accepted by most (if not all) of the Jewish Christians (cf. Acts 21:17), but his arrest may have cast a shadow on his entire work. (3) He did not arrive at Rome in a joyful manner but as a prisoner (cf. commentary on 15:29), and (4) he had ample time to relax with the Roman Christians but not in the manner desired (cf. Moo, *Romans*, 911). That is, he was probably in house arrest around A.D. 60–62 (Acts 28)."

⁶⁷ This term is used only here in the NT. It is a compound of *sun* ("together with") and *agonizomai* ("to contend, to fight, to strive earnestly," cf. 1 Cor 9:25; Col 1:29; 4:12; 1 Tim 4:10; 6:12).

⁶⁸ Quoted in D. A. Carson, *A Call To Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Nottingham: InterVarsity, 1992), 210.

⁶⁹ Carson, *A Call To Spiritual Reformation*, 215 eloquently writes: "The New International Version speaks of 'the unbelievers in Judea' from whom Paul wishes to be rescued. The Greek is stronger: they are 'the disobedient in Judea' or 'the rebels of Judea.' The distinction is important, especially today. We are inclined to buy into the modern view that 'belief' is simply a matter of opinion. Whether or not you are a believer is a private matter. It has to do with your disposition and conditioning; no matters of ultimate truth are at stake. The New Testament writers, however, including Paul, never see things that way. They hold that God has objectively revealed himself—not only in the distant past, but now decisively in his Son, Jesus Christ, whom he raised from the dead. Not to trust him totally is not merely a question of religious preference, not a matter of 'unbelief' in the modern sense, but willful disobedience, moral rebellion. It is the sinful elevation of personal opinion and preference and priorities above the centrality of God, who has with matchless kindness, forbearance, and love powerfully revealed himself to us. Not to

believe that kind of God and that kind of revelation owes everything to utter self-idolatry, to sinful worship of self and all its myopic opinions. It is, in short, flagrant rebellion.”

⁷⁰ Stott, *Romans*, 389 further explains: “In accepting the gift from Paul, Jewish Christian leaders would be seen to endorse Paul’s gospel and his seeming disregard of Jewish law and traditions. Yet if his offering were to be rejected, this could cause the rift between Jewish and Gentile Christians to widen irrevocably. So Paul longs that Jewish—Gentile solidarity in the body of Christ may be strengthened by the Jewish Christians’ acceptance of its tangible symbol. That is why he asks the Romans to pray both that the believers will accept the gift and that unbelievers will not be able to prevent either the giving or the receiving of it.”

⁷¹ The prepositional phrase *dia thelematos theou* (“by/through the will of God”) is used only by Paul (Rom 15:32; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:5; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1).

⁷² How this prayer was answered is another story, recorded in Acts 27–28. Once again, God worked in ways beyond human anticipation. Paul would indeed be delivered from the unbelieving Jews and arrive safely in Rome.

⁷³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 783.

⁷⁴ Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 2*, 265–66.

⁷⁵ The title “the God of peace” is also used in Rom 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16; Heb 13:20.

⁷⁶ Stott, *Romans*, 390.

⁷⁷ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSIwBQuImgI>; accessed 21 August 2011. There are also more videos of him on YouTube.

⁷⁸ This worksheet has been adapted and expanded from a Bible study guide by Charles R. Swindoll entitled *Relating to Others in Love* (Fullerton: Insight for Living, 1985), 49.