

# Romans 1:8-15: Why Rome? Why Romans?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 13 May 2007

Preacher: Arthur Jackson

[ 0 : 00 ]     14 of the Red Pew Bibles. At this time, children from age 3 through grade 5 may be dismissed for their children's program. Again, that's Romans 1, verses 8 through 15, on page 914. Would you please rise with me in honor of God's Word?

Amen. I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented, in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also, who are in Rome.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good afternoon, Holy Trinity family.

It is good to be here on this afternoon. David tried to trip me up so he could preach this afternoon, but it didn't work. We're in the Book of Romans.

[ 1 : 54 ]     What a book. What an exciting book it is. I pray that our exposition rises to the level of our excitement. For the glory of his name, pause with me in prayer.

We'll move forward. Dear Lord, thank you for the truth that is before us and your people that's before us. Be glorified through your word.

May it minister to our hearts. May it sanctify us. May it serve to conform us to the likeness of your Son.

And we give ourselves to these things in Christ's name. Amen. And over the years, the scholarly debate that has swirled around Romans has come to us even today.

Indeed, one of the books that I purchase, one of my library on Romans has expanded probably twofold over the last six weeks or so.

[ 3 : 05 ]     One of the books that I purchase is entitled The Romans Debate. The book deals with matters concerning the occasion, the purpose of the book.

The book's structure, the book's rhetoric, the historical and the social factors that were in play at the time of writing, and other factors that are germane to the understanding of the book.

Without question, because of the past and present scholarship that surrounds the book of Romans, we are better prepared to dialogue with integrity at the lay level, at the pastoral level, and even at the academic level because of these works.

In the midst of such dialogue and conversation and debate, however, you and I must never forget the ultimate source of the book of Romans.

The divine author is God himself. The bottom line for us is that Romans is the inspired word of God.

[ 4 : 39 ]     And because it's that, it demands from each and every one of us, those who are proclaiming God's truth, those who are listening to it, and all of us who are seeking to apply it, it demands from us a prayerful listening and a whole life response.

Doug Moo, professor and author, helps us to see some of these things in his commentary. He gives a caution for us.

He cautions us about getting lost with some of these other things that swirl around the book to the neglect of the larger theological and philosophical concerns of the biblical authors themselves.

This is what he writes. That Paul was dealing in Romans with immediate concerns in the early church, we do not doubt. But especially in Romans, these are ultimately those of the church and the world of all ages.

The continuity of God's plan, the sin and need of human beings, God's provision for our sin problem in Christ, the means to a life of holiness and security in the face of suffering and death.

[ 6 : 15 ] Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, whatever their failings as exegetes, saw this.

And perhaps they understood more clearly than many of their latter-day critics. We need to recognize that Romans is God's word to us and read it seeking to discover the message that God has for us in it.

And then he quotes Luther. Listen to this. As Luther said, Romans is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word by heart, but occupy himself with it every day as the daily bread of the soul.

It can never be read or pondered too much. And the more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.

End of quote. Huh? Romans tastes good. Good. It is good for the soul. It is good for the sanctification of our lives, and yes, the orientation of our lives.

[ 7 : 37 ] May we never forget that. So, we come to the text today. With these things in mind, we come to Romans 1, verses 8 through 15.

Here we are still in the book's introduction. And look what he says. Let me turn to the passage here. There we are.

First, I thank my God through Christ Jesus for all of you. Huh? What we're trying to do today is to make sense of two crucial questions.

If I were to give you a takeaway, I want you to take away the answers to a couple of two crucial questions.

Number one, why Rome? And number two, why Romans? Why Rome and why Romans?

[ 8 : 42 ] Why was the book written? Why did Paul go to Rome? We're still in the introduction with verse 8. As a matter of fact, in verses 1 through 7, the day preached on last week, Paul had presented his apostolic credentials, his apostolic calling card, if you will.

At the time of writing, he had not yet visited the Roman church. His personal information, just like one might have on a calling card, is given in verses 1 through 7.

And several things are answered there, are there not? Who are you? I'm an apostle. I'm set apart for, as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the gospel.

What's your business? David put it well on last week. He's in the gospeling business, huh? So the introduction includes the verses that we have today.

And answers to the why Rome question have a way of emerging from the text that is before us. Consider the following outline of the passage, if you will.

[ 10 : 04 ] In verses 8 through 10, we see Paul's prayers. That's the focus of verses 8 through 10. Paul's plans come into view in verses 11 through 13.

And then in verses 14 and 15, we see Paul's passions. Paul's prayers, Paul's plans, and Paul's passions.

So we turn our attention to his prayers. Having appropriately introduced himself, Paul continued with the letter's opening.

As a matter of fact, the opening paragraphs in this letter are the longest of all of Paul's letters. As a matter of fact, if you were counting verses and not chapters, Romans is the longest of Paul's letters, huh?

But he began intentionally and appropriately with the thanksgiving for all the believers in Rome. You see that?

[ 11 : 12 ] I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all of the world.

He offers thanks to God in view of the person and the work of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And why not?

Is not Jesus Christ the agent of God's amazing grace to us? Is not he the one that by his work and person and his saving, his atonement, that you and I have access to God?

Paul gives his reason for thanksgiving. It was for the widespread Christian witness of the church in Rome. Their collective witness was known in the Mediterranean world.

The Lord was at work in Rome and the people knew about it. The word had spread about the Romans' faith just as the word about the Thessalonians' faith had spread.

[ 12 : 23 ] And we see that in 1 Thessalonians 1, verses 8-10. And listen as I read that, just to establish this connection, this common ground. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you, he's speaking to the church of the Thessalonians, who in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything, for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven whom we raise from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

And again, the word had gone out in the eastern Mediterranean world that faith had come to Thessalonica. And here we see here, the word of the faith of the Romans had also gone out and it spread into the known world of that day.

Like the epicenter of an earthquake, the gospel had begun in Jerusalem and the aftershocks had spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean world.

There was a gospel witness in the chief city of the empire in Rome. The news of their faith had been proclaimed throughout the world.

Paul's prayers included his, not only his thanksgiving in verse 8, but his petitions in verses 9 and 10. Verse 8, I thank God for you, but verses 9 and 10, I am praying for you.

[ 14 : 12 ] To express the legitimacy of what Paul was saying, notice what he says in verse 9. For God is my witness. God can testify for me, this God whom I serve in my spirit, in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you.

God can testify for him. Though he was physically absent from the believers in Rome, the nature of his relationship with God and his service to God allowed for prayer engagement with God on behalf of the Roman believers.

Before God, he had made this matter of going to Rome a regular matter of prayer, constant prayer, unceasing prayer. Rome was on the apostle's mind.

He wanted to go there. In view of that, he was offering his prayers to God constantly about this, really, I believe, a God-placed desire in him to go there.

I believe a few comments are in order regarding Paul's prayer on behalf of the Roman believers. Listen to this, because I think it's key. Paul's prayer engagement was his first ministry engagement with them.

[ 15 : 37 ] His prayer engagement with them, or for them, was his first ministry engagement on their behalf. His prayers for them preceded his personal engagement with them.

Isn't that instructive for you and me as it relates to our prayers? For me, this is a reminder of our 3-1-2 prayer initiative.

You remember that? Praying for three people over a space of two years that one of them would come to faith in Christ.

Is your prayer engagement preceding your engagement with people at a missional kind of level? Huh? A prayer engagement is so critical.

I had a great answer to prayer on even this, on Friday. As I had a couple of back-to-back meetings, and as I prayed and went into the first meeting, not knowing that the second meeting was going to be a direct connection with what was going on in the first meeting, God, in sort of an immediate, sort of gotcha kind of way, answered an immediate kind of prayer.

[ 16 : 54 ] Our prayer engagement needs to precede our sort of life engagement, our ministry engagement with people. If you haven't tried it, you might want to do so, and particularly as it relates to this initiative to see people come to Christ.

Let's not forget that. It's a crucial initiative. Huh? Here we have this glimpse of the fossil. We see his heart for these people that he is planning on going to.

He is compelled by his apostolic call to the very nations, verse 5. He had his eyes on Rome, and the verses that follow here help us to see, at least in part, why Paul wanted to go there.

In verses 11 through 13, we are put in touch with Paul's plans. Why did Paul want to go to Rome? First thing we see it in verse 11.

He wanted to give to them. He wanted to use his spiritual gifts to strengthen or to establish them.

[ 18 : 13 ] You see that in verse 11? For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. For the purpose of being used by God to strengthen the believers in Rome, that was at least one of the reasons that Paul wanted to go there.

He was aware of his calling that God had set him apart as an apostle to the nations, huh? Aware of his calling and he wanted to be used of God in various capacities.

Similarly, in Rome as he had been used in other places that God had called him to. And through the exercise of spiritual gifts, believers had been encouraged and built up throughout the, you might say, the eastern Mediterranean world.

He wanted to be able to do something similar in Rome. He wanted to invest in what God was doing in the lives of the believers in Rome.

So the question is that, well, is he going there? Is he going like a spiritual Santa Claus and he's going to impart spiritual gifts to those people there who were at Rome?

[ 19 : 24 ] Huh? Passing out spiritual gifts? Well, the idea of impart is not that Paul was going to give a spiritual gift. The idea is that he was going to use the spiritual gift because God, after all, he's the actual dispenser of spiritual gifts, is he not?

But he could use, he could share the gifts that God had given him and that seems to be what's in view here. Huh? Do you see yourself as a channel through which God can work and dispense his grace for the strengthening and establishing of his people?

That is what Paul wanted to do. And God has so much grace to give, so much grace to dispense, that he needs many, many, many, many, many channels through which to dispense that grace.

And those spiritual gifts, and as a believer, each of us has these kind of spiritual capacities that God can use us to strengthen and to encourage faith in others. Huh?

Do you see God using you in that kind of capacity? Huh? He does so through, not only through teaching and preaching, but through hospitality and through mercy and generosity.

[ 20 : 39 ] And according to 1 Peter, chapter 4, verses 10 and 11, as every man has received the gift, we are recipients, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

We're dispensers of God's grace through the gifts that he has given us. Paul had this intense longing to see the Roman Christians so we could be used to the Lord to strengthen and establish them to help them to grow and to mature in Christ.

But not only did Paul want to give to them, look at verse 12, he wanted to receive personal encouragement from them. Wow.

Here's this great apostle to the nation. But notice what he says in verse 12. This, that is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

While Paul viewed himself as a giver, being used to strengthen and establish, he also saw himself as a receiver. He was aware of the dynamics of interdependence.

[ 21 : 57 ] He constantly requested, you know, in his letters, pray for me. He wasn't alone in ministry or alone in life. He knew the value of the body of Christ.

The believers in Rome had something not only to receive, but they had something to give. the desired result from a visit from Paul's perspective was mutual encouragement.

The encouragement that Paul anticipated was not simply one way, it was two-way. I love the New American Standard version of this verse. This is what it says, verses 11 and 12.

I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established. That is, that I may be encouraged together with you, while among you, each of us, by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

There was this gospel reciprocity that would be going on when Paul went to Rome. Paul, why are you going to Rome?

[ 23 : 06 ] I'm going to Rome to give, but I'm also going to be strengthened through others who will encourage my faith through the use of their gifts. He believed in gospel reciprocity.

Question, do you? I think we call it around Holy Trinity, sharing our lives together in Christ. That's what gospel reciprocity is all about.

Huh? This great dynamic, it crosses social boundaries barriers And may the Lord give grace even among us, huh, to be both givers and receivers, whether you are young or old or somewhere in between, whether you're GED or PhD, you're in the body and you have needs and I have needs too and you have something to give.

Huh? Huh? What a great example. Even among us, a church that has so much what I call crash potential because, I mean, we can have a way of bumping into one another because of the very differences that we have.

Oh, but Christ is the great leveler and if we would find ourselves being both on the giving end as well as the receiving in you have something to give and may we grow together in Christ.

[ 24 : 49 ] May we mingle our lives together so in Christ that we would be an encouragement to one another, that our lives would be mingled together for the mutual encouragement and strengthening for what purpose?

For the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our communities, in our city, and in our world. Paul's plan to give to them, Paul's plan to receive from them, but also notice verse 13, he wanted to gather a harvest from among them.

Look at the verse. I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but this thus far had been prevented in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

He wanted to gather a harvest from among them. And up until the time of writing, Paul had been hindered from going to Rome.

He had good intentions, but he didn't have the opportunity it hadn't come yet. Why hadn't the apostle of the Gentiles showed up in the chief Gentile city?

[ 26 : 14 ] I think Romans chapter 15 provides a bit of commentary, and let me invite you to turn over to Romans chapter 15 to help expand on what we're seeing here.

here. We know, look at verse 22, we know that Paul's gospel engagement up to this point had been in Asia Minor, the eastern Mediterranean world, and his engagement and involvement there had prevented him from going into the western Mediterranean world.

Look, verse 22, for this reason, for this is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. And if you will go back into the verses before, he talks about his involvement, and he had no places left there, so all of that was done.

You might say he was about to put a period, and he had some things, he was going to go from Corinth, then he was going to go to Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem, his desire was then to go to Rome.

But now, since I have no longer had any room, verse 23, for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and be helped on my journey there by you, once I've enjoyed your company for a while.

[ 27 : 51 ] At the present, however, I'm going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints, huh? He wanted to reap a harvest among them.

His desire was then to go to them, having completed his mission over in the eastern Mediterranean, huh? He wanted to reap a harvest from among them, or together from among them.

How are we to understand this word in, back to 1.13, the word harvest, I may reap some harvest among you, huh?

What's Paul there referring to? From what we see in the text, the harvest that he expected to gain in Rome was comparable, similar to the fruit that he had gathered from a mother, among other Gentile peoples.

What had he gathered from other Gentile peoples? First of all, picture Paul as a fruit picker with a bag over his shoulder. He's going to Rome and he wanted to gather fruit from among them.

[ 29 : 03 ] From whence would he gather the fruit? The fruit would then certainly include evangelistic labors, huh? He would hope to be used of the Lord to win people in Rome to Christ through evangelism.

We see that, don't we? Acts chapter 28, interacting with Jewish leaders, hoping to convince them that Jesus is the Christ. He lived there, Acts 28, 30, two whole years at his own expense.

Welcome all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, without hindrance. He hoped to gather fruit.

He landed in Rome, Acts 28. He did give himself to evangelism, but there was also a harvest to be gathered in the church.

His desire was for the maturity of believers. He would anticipate being used of God to help them grow in the knowledge of Christ and in Christ's character and in Christian service.

[ 30 : 09 ] That's what it means to grow up in him. Not simply to get information. the goal of God's word in our heart is not simply information, it's the transformation of our lives.

The goal is to be like him. Paul's goals, as we put it here at Holy Trinity, were both missional on the one hand, but they also had the maturity of the saints in mind.

Had he not been used of God to do so in his other ministerial endeavors, his evangelistic endeavors, his teaching, his Christian teaching, his epistles for the growth and the maturity, the correction of the saints of God.

While these things seem to be mostly clear, there is another possibility that Paul had in mind the financial assistance of the believers at Rome.

We see in Romans chapter 15 verse 28, there's a term that's translated there, what has been collected. That word is the same word for fruit or harvest that we see in chapter 1 verse 13.

[ 31 : 29 ] So there's a possibility that this is also in view as far as help from them in order to advance the gospel on and to the west.

Paul's prayers, Paul's plans, and we see in them why he wanted to go to Rome. And finally in verses 14 and 15, Paul's passion.

Listen to him. Listen to the heart of this servant of God. He says, I'm under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Apostle to the nations, chapter 1 verse 5, chapter 1 verse 13. Paul saw himself as a debtor. I like the old King James, I'm a debtor.

[ 32 : 32 ] Under obligation. this compelling obligation that spanned the breadth of Gentile humanity. He had been set aside, set apart for proclamation of the gospel to the nations.

The metaphor here is one of stewardship, isn't it? Something that had been entrusted to another person with the attendant and appropriate responsibilities that goes along with that.

And Paul had been entrusted with the gospel. His obligation included the full range of Gentile humanity, as we see in verse 14.

Gentile speaking, I mean, Greek speaking, and non-Greek speaking humanity. Those whose speech sounded like, to Greek speaking people sounded like gibberish, or bah, bah, bah, bah.

That's where you get the word barbarian. those who were considered uncultured and unsophisticated. Paul said, regardless of where you fall on the spectrum, the gospel is to go to you, to all.

[ 33 : 49 ] Those considered superior, those considered inferior. Those in Rome fit the people profile that Paul was called to minister to.

Gentile people from every strata of society, and he wanted to get there to fulfill his obligation to them. Was he going, kicking, or screaming?

No, in no way. He was eager to do so. Gospel eagerness and gospel readiness characterize the sermon of God.

The question is, what about you? What about me? Eager to get the gospel out? Eager to share the gospel? Here in the introduction, we are exposed to one whose clear passion, he has clear passion for the work that had been assigned to him by God.

His passion comes through. He prays for and longs to be with the believers in Rome. He was looking forward to be with them for mutual spiritual benefit.

[ 35 : 03 ] He wanted in on the gospel harvest in Rome. He was eager to preach to them the gospel. Gospel readiness characterized him, and so he was about to pen this document that's been passed on to us.

But before the church in Rome reads the gospel portfolio of Paul in the rest of the letter, they're made aware of his prayers and of his plans and of his passion for the work that God had called into.

Paul is compelled by his apostolic call to the nations. He's compelled to pray for the believers in Rome and to be prayed for by them.

Chapter 15 verse 30. He is compelled to use his gifts among them and to be strengthened and refreshed by them. Chapter 1 verse 12 chapter 15 verse 32.

He's compelled to engage in gospel ministry among them and to reap a harvest from among them. He's compelled to go to the believers in Rome and then to go from them into the western Mediterranean world.

[ 36 : 25 ] And this letter prepared them for his visit. In it he laid out the gospel that he proclaimed and would proclaim with their support in the parts in the western world to include Spain.

So in this regard Romans was his first portfolio. that he was presenting to them. You know how it is when you're doing a presentation trying to make a point?

Romans certainly is that for Paul. So as we wrap up the message on today I do so back to the words that I began with where Luther spoke about Romans as being our daily bread.

So the question and the question that I would encourage you to ask us as we seek to proclaim this God's truth in this letter so what's the daily bread from the text that you proclaim?

I mean what you said is nice but what's the daily bread in there for us? How can I live better huh? Well a few things as I wrap up.

[ 37 : 38 ] may our prayers for people precede our personal interactions with them. I mentioned that earlier. May we see the value of prayer preceding whatever the work that might be.

And let me encourage you whether you're in a so-called secular sense and I don't know if that's a good word for a believer because life is so integrated where there's nothing off limits from our faith.

But may our prayers precede our interactions with people. May we understand friends and engage in gospel reciprocity that we are part of an interdependent body.

May we participate in the giving and receiving cycle for our individual and corporate encouragement. May there be this cry from our hearts.

Lord, use me in this body of people. Are you on the fringes? Maybe you don't feel that you really belong or have a part here.

[ 38 : 50 ] Let me encourage you to come from the fringes. There's room for gospel engagement for receiving and giving even among us. I encourage you for that.

May we be aware that gospel eagerness is not just something for apostles and preachers and pastors. It's for all of us as the body of Christ.

May there be a fresh eagerness to proclaim. And you haven't been, as Paul, called to the Gentile world, but you've been called to be a witness in the world and in your world.

I think that oftentimes we lose our gospel eagerness. We're not sharing to the degree that we could or even should.



So what do we have here? Here as the introduction continues, we get a glimpse of the man behind the message that helps explain why Paul wanted to visit Rome while he wrote the epistle to the Romans.

[ 40 : 07 ] May we find ourselves likewise giving ourselves in our world with our gifts for the cause of Christ and gospel engagement in the world and life engagement with one another.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for the glimpse that we've seen of your servant and may we be encouraged through this glimpse and may we glorify you in our world and even in the midst of the people that you have placed us and called us to.

We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Let's do it.