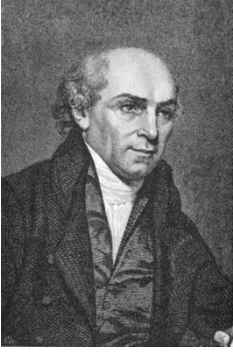


**ADVANCE CHRIST: PAUL'S MISSIONARY VISION**  
**ROMANS 15:22-29**



**William Carey** has come to be well-known for his work in missions, but he started in relative obscurity. When he first sought ordination from the [Baptist church in Olney](#), he was rejected by them in 1785, before being ordained the following year and taking the pastorate of the church in Moulton. He and his wife Dorothy had a daughter Ann in the first years of marriage, but Ann soon died. Those early years were also lean years financially, so that Carey had to work as pastor, village teacher, and shoe cobbler to support the family.

Yet in those years, Carey began to have a passion for taking the gospel to the nations; in his cobbler's workshop he made a homemade map of the world and began collecting data on the world's population which he incorporated into his 87-page book, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of Heathens, in which the religious state of the different nations of the world, the success of former undertakings, and the practicability of further undertakings, are considered*. This "'little piece,' as Carey called it, would become the manifesto of the modern missionary movement." [George, 21-2.] His passion for the salvation of the lost is seen throughout the document, but perhaps most boldly in his statement, "I question whether all are justified in staying here, while so many are perishing without means of grace in other lands."

The book was published in 1792 and later that year Carey spoke to an association of pastors from 24 churches. In that sermon he coined a phrase which became the driving influence of his missionary venture: **"expect great things; attempt great things."** The day after that message, the group was about to disperse without having acted on Carey's petition about evangelism and missions. So Carey, gripped with sorrow over unregenerate men going to Hell without the gospel rose and asked the moderator, "Is there nothing again going to be done, sir?" Because of this last query the pastors agreed to form a society "for propagating the gospel among the heathen." By November, they received a request from John Thomas in India for someone to minister with him there, and the society naturally chose Carey.

Seven months later, in June of 1793, Carey left England with his wife and children, her sister, and John Thomas and his family. But it was no easy transition. None of them would ever see England again. All died in India, Carey after almost 41 years of labor there. He buried three of his children; his wife Dorothy plunged into "insanity" after the death of their third child and never recovered. His second wife was also buried by Carey. And he spent nearly 20 years translating the Bible into Hindi and it was destroyed in a fire one night and he had to start the work over from the beginning — 20 years of work completely lost.

What compels a William Carey to take the gospel to India and endure amidst such hardship? Or Jack and Susie to Cambodia? Or David and Kerry to PNG? Or our friends who have taken the gospel to build churches in Lebanon and the Middle East? Those aren't all safe places — they and their families may be in harm's way and will likely suffer. Why? Because they have a vision for the gospel to go to the nations — a missionary vision that is akin to the apostle Paul's vision.

For three Sundays, we are thinking with Paul about missions. As Paul prepares to go to Spain — and as he prepares to come to Rome and ask for support to help him get to Spain — in vv. 17-21 he reveals the message he preaches: Christ; in vv. 30-33 he will talk about the power for missions, and in vv. 22-29 (which we consider today) he reveals his vision for missions — what is his goal and strategy for evangelizing the nations? We might summarize his teaching this way:

*THE GOAL OF EVERY BELIEVER AND EVERY CHURCH IS TO ALWAYS PLAN FOR THE NEXT MISSIONARY VENTURE.*

In these verses Paul establishes **four principles** for advancing the gospel message of Christ in missions:

1. Trust **GOD** with Your Missions Plans (vv. 22-23)
2. Look to Help the International Church **FINANCIALLY** (v. 24)
3. Care for Churches Already **ENTRUSTED** to You (vv. 25-27)
4. Be Ready to **GO** and **BLESS** (vv. 28-29)

**Summary:**

- Some are sent and some send, but all participate
- Some give and some receive, but all participate
- Some plans “work” and some plans “fail,” but God always accomplishes His purposes

## 1. Trust **God** with Your Missions Plans (vv. 22-23)

- In vv. 15-21 Paul recounted some of his ministry responsibilities as an apostle to the Gentiles. Those duties were the **reason** he was unable to go to Rome earlier than he did.
  - ✓ He says that he has **often been prevented** from going to Rome (more than once). While he doesn't expand here, he makes similar statements at least two other times:
    - In **1 Thess. 2:18** he says that more than once he had attempted to go to Thessalonica, but Satan had prevented/hindered him from going (again, we don't know what the hindrance was). [Obviously we need to understand this as Satan operating within God's permission.]
    - In **Acts 16:6-7** Luke says that Paul and Timothy were prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching in Asia. In vv. 9-10, it appears that it was a vision that re-directed him.
  - ✓ It seems from **v. 23** that part of the restraint was other ministry priorities, which have now been completed. Regardless, though we do not know the circumstances that precluded Paul from going to Rome (or the other places), we need to understand that it was God who re-directed him.
  - ✓ This phrase hints at the relationship between God's will and man's desires and plans — a man (like Paul here) may make particular plans — and even do so believing them to be God's purposes for him because they are godly, God-honoring plans — and yet God may circumvent and change those plans for other greater purposes.
  - ✓ Paul also seems to be very "matter of fact" about it — content with God changing his plans.
- But also notice how Paul has reiterated that he *did* have plans for missionary ventures:
  - ✓ He had planned on going to Rome (cf. **1:10**). He wanted to work for their maturity (**1:11**) and see **fruit** produced among the Romans (**1:13**), in ways similar to his other missionary ventures (**among the rest of the Gentiles**, 1:13). It is a passionate **longing** (v. 23) — a deep desire ("in his bones").
  - ✓ Verse 23 also tells us that he has had these plans for **years** — he has had a long-standing intention to go to Rome (and beyond that to **Spain**; he might have had the same thought in **2 Cor. 10:16**).
  - ✓ So, Paul's desire is "deep and wide" — deep inside him and long in duration.
  - ✓ Paul is always thinking about the advance of the gospel and taking it to unreached places. He has a passion for the unbelieving and a sorrow over those who do not yet trust Christ (**9:2-3**; **10:1ff**). His lament is not unlike what Carey would say 18 centuries later: "Is there nothing again going to be done, sir?" Are we still going to sit and watch and do nothing while people die and go to Hell?
  - ✓ Similarly, Spurgeon said, "If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for." [in Lawson, 84.]

- That passion compelled Paul to always make missionary plans. But even while he made those plans, he was not anxious when the Lord sovereignly laid those plans aside — even for years. He trusted God.
- As we think about missions, we want to have the same perspective:
  - ✓ Do we care that people in PNG and Russia and Israel and Lebanon and Afghanistan are headed towards Hell because no one has yet told them the truth?
  - ✓ Where can we go and with whom can we join in the venture to take the message of Christ (vv. 17-21) to the nations? We should be answering that question both privately and corporately.
  - ✓ With new missionaries in Chile we now have missionaries in every continent (except Antarctica); how about two on every continent? How about one *from GBC* on every continent?
  - ✓ While we have always been committed to missions, we — *I* — have not been proactive enough in developing a clear plan on where we go next. I'd like to have that change, and then see what God in His grace might do through our obedient zeal for the nations.

## 2. Look to Help the International Church FINANCIALLY (v. 24)

- When Paul mentions Spain in v. 24, we find the purpose of this section (and the entire book).
  - ✓ Paul wants to **see** the Romans (same as 1:10ff), but here he makes it clear that he intends just to “pass through” — he is not making a long-term commitment to stay in Rome.
  - ✓ The primary reason he wants to go to Rome is that he wants to be **helped on my way there...**
  - ✓ The word **helped** is obviously broad, but it was used in the NT to refer to providing whatever one needed to accomplish a particular task (always in the NT for travel “expenses”). Cf. 1 Cor. 16:6, 11; 2 Cor. 1:16; **Tt. 3:13**; **3 Jn. 6**.
  - ✓ It's possible that he is looking for traveling companions to go to Spain, but more likely, he is seeking material (financial) support for his venture to Spain.
  - ✓ He also is probably asking Rome to serve as the base of this westward venture. Antioch has been his base of operations prior to this, but it is more than 1000 miles away from Rome, so it is impractical to serve Paul in this venture.
- Two implications from this verse:
  - ✓ Paul is unashamed to ask for help — because it's appropriate for the church to help with missionary tasks and the care of other churches (which we will see in the following verses).
  - ✓ The church seems willing to help — and the other NT churches did seemingly help with joy (**3 Jn. 6**; **2 Cor. 8:2-4**). While they couldn't go, they were willing to stay and give so others could go.
  - ✓ It's tempting to say, “everyone should become a missionary.” That statement has two problems:
    - It ignores the necessity of God's call and gifting — not everyone is gifted to go.
    - It ignores the history of the church (most stayed) — and the practicality of supporting others.
  - ✓ It's more appropriate to say, “I'm willing to go, but if I can't go, I'll send (support) someone else.”

### 3. Care for Churches Already **ENTRUSTED** to You (vv. 25-27)

- Paul has acknowledged multiple disruptions to his plans to visit Rome, and these vv. give another:
  - ✓ **But now** = there are new circumstances compelling his actions.
  - ✓ The problem is that there is a need in the Jerusalem church and Paul has been collecting funds to care for that church (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9).
  - ✓ Now he has those funds and they need to get to Jerusalem; in those days an EFT was a boat trip.
  - ✓ Why does *he* have to go? Why not send someone else? He made the promise to take it; but notice that he says that taking it to them is **servicing the saints** (v. 25).
  - ✓ That was Paul's ministry to the Jerusalem church, and he was eager to do it (Gal. 2:10).
  - ✓ This was at least the second time that Paul had brought such a gift to the Jerusalem church; he also brought a gift from Syrian Antioch when Jerusalem was in a famine (Acts 11:29-30; 12:25)
  - ✓ We should notice **from a map** that this trip was no small inconvenience for Paul: it was some 800 miles from Corinth to Jerusalem, 1500 miles from Jerusalem to Rome, and 700 from Rome to Spain.
  - ✓ Yet apart from his "regret" for the delay in showing up in Rome, he is not disappointed or discontent; he sees all these things as from the hand of God and accomplishing God's purposes.
- How should churches care for other churches in other countries? *With joy*.
  - ✓ Notice the repeated emphasis on the word **pleased** (both vv. 26 and 27).
  - ✓ The word emphasizes joy in doing what they did; there was no sense of compulsion or duty — no "if I have to do this, I guess I will..." They did it "freely" and have great delight in sending the gift.
  - ✓ The gift was also for the **poor...in Jerusalem**. That doesn't mean the entire church in Jerusalem was poor, but only that there was a significant portion of the church that had financial need and the other churches joyfully took care of that need, which was the pattern of the church from the beginning (Acts 2:44-45). We don't believe in communism, but we do believe in generous sharing.
  - ✓ Did you notice that Paul mentions **Macedonia** and **Achaia**? Other churches also contributed to the gift, so why did he single out these two churches, since others also participated — Thessalonica (part of Macedonia), Greece, Berea, Derbe, "Asia," and Galatia, (Acts 20:4; 1 Cor. 16:1)?
    - **Macedonia** included the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica and while a prominent part of the ancient Greek empire, by biblical times it was very poor — yet they begged to help (2 Cor. 8:1ff).
    - **Achaia** was a region that included 12 cities in southern Greece. Achaia would head into decline in a few decades, but it doesn't appear that it is yet poor. My personal speculation is that Paul includes this group of churches because Achaia included Corinth — perhaps the most "rebellious" church in NT times, yet in their repentance, they also gave joyfully.
  - ✓ For Paul to single out these two churches is to emphasize the joy of giving, even when one may not have much to give — what we have from the Lord we have so that we can care for others.

- Why should churches care for other churches in other countries?
  - ✓ The church of Christ has never been about “take care of yourself first,” but “be sure to care of others.” You have been given what you have so that you are equipped to share.

“...there are three levels of how to live with things: (1) you can steal to get; (2) or you can work to get; (3) or you can work to get in order to give.

“Too many professing Christians live on level two. Almost all the forces of our culture urge them to live on level two. But the Bible pushes us relentlessly to level three. “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Why does God bless us with abundance? So we can have enough to live on, and then use the rest for all manner of good works that alleviate spiritual and physical misery. Enough for us; abundance for others.

“The issue is not how much a person makes. Big industry and big salaries are a fact of our times, and they are not necessarily evil. The evil is in being deceived into thinking a six-digit salary must be accompanied by a six-digit lifestyle. God has made us to be conduits of His grace. The danger is in thinking the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn’t. Copper will do.” [Piper, *Desiring God*, 202-3.]

- ✓ The passage also is explicit about why we should care for other people in other places. The word **contribution** (v. 26) is “fellowship” (*koinōnia*). It has the sense of “sharing” material goods, but in the church it also has the idea of sharing with one another spiritually — and the readers could not have missed that connection: when we share with each other physically, we are demonstrating our spiritual connection with one another and also sharing spiritually with each other.
- ✓ Paul also sees this as a duty — they are **indebted**; they share financially because they have received a spiritual gift from the Jerusalem church. The Jerusalem church sent out the first missionaries and all believers everywhere can trace their spiritual roots back to that church. Paul’s reasoning is that because they received **spiritual blessings** from that church it is appropriate to share **material things**.
- ✓ Paul is not saying that they are “paying back” or being “taxed” for what they received spiritually, but he is simply saying there is a moral privilege to sacrificially reciprocate (which they did; **2 Cor. 8:5-7**).
- ✓ Is there a conflict between doing it joyfully and being obligated to do it? No! There are many obligations that we do joyfully —
  - It’s a husband’s duty to love his wife (and hers to love him) — and he can do that with joy
  - It’s a father’s duty to provide for his family — and he can do that with joy
  - It’s a pastor’s duty to care for his people and to pray for them — and he can do that with joy
  - It is a believer’s duty to share the gospel wherever he goes — and he can do that with joy
  - None of those “duties” preclude doing them with joy. They mutually co-exist...
- ✓ Whatever missions desires we want to cultivate and pursue, we recognize the obligations that we already have and we joyfully want to care for those who have been entrusted to our care and that have ministered to us and with us. We say it this way in our missions policy —

“We commit to providing necessary resources (both spiritual and temporal) to encourage and equip them for greater personal maturity and more effective public ministry. We are available, as much as possible to be a resource and equipping center for our missionaries. We heartily affirm that because they are going out ‘for the sake of the name,’ it is our joyful obligation (not the world’s responsibility) to care for them through helpful financial support (3 Jn. 7-8), biblical discipleship, and ecclesiological oversight and accountability.” [p. 5]

#### 4. Be Ready to **GO** and **BLESS** (vv. 28-29)

- Because of everything that he has said about missions in these verses, Paul says **therefore...**
  - ✓ He is making a conclusion about his missionary intention. Jerusalem is a priority, but he still fully intends to go to Spain after he has **finished this** responsibility.
  - ✓ He is going to make sure the gift arrives safely in Jerusalem (which is what he means by **put my seal**) on the gift — and then he is going to the next step in his ministry.
  - ✓ He is **ready to go** — as has already been noted, there is a willingness and readiness to go with the gospel wherever it is most strategic for him to go.
  - ✓ This readiness is one of the marks of a missionary — it’s the “send me in, coach” mentality; it is the racehorse at the starting gate that is poised to run that indicates that one might be prepared and called by God for missions. How do you know if you’re equipped to go as a missionary? It’s this relentless passion and desire to go with the gospel and endure hardship for the sake of conversions.
- Paul is also going with the intent to bring **the fullness of the blessing of Christ**. He is coming to Rome to seek help from them to go to Spain, but he also wants to minister to them spiritually (**1:10ff**). He needs their help, but he is not insensitive to their need as well and he is ready and wants to be useful in caring for and ministering to God’s people wherever he is.
- Paul is always concerned about the needs of others before himself —
  - ✓ He wants the gospel to go to the nations, no matter where that takes him and what he endures. (Lest we think it was “glamorous,” we do well to re-read **2 Cor. 11:23ff**.)
  - ✓ He is always concerned about the spiritual progress of the churches where he is going and where he has been (2 Cor. 11:28; read his prayers in his letters).
  - ✓ He is willing to sacrifice himself to care for others spiritually and to advance the gospel (**2 Tim. 4:6**).
- These are appropriate tests for the motives of missionaries — and if your motives are 1) I want/have to go; and 2) I’m ready to bless and wanting to bless, then it might be that the Lord is preparing you to go and bless others after the pattern of Paul.

## Summary:

- ✓ **Some are sent and some send, but *all participate*** — there are no Christians on the sidelines of missions; we are *all* involved in the process. We really are partners together in one global enterprise.
- ✓ **Some give and some receive, but *all participate*** — if you are a missionary, you receive gifts; if you are not a missionary, you give gifts. That's the way God has planned it (and one of the reasons why most do not go as missionaries — some need to stay and support and pray). If we stay —
  - We commit to pray regularly (what Carey called “holding the ropes”).
  - We commit to support financially as substantially as possible.
  - We commit to provide necessary resources (both physical and spiritual) to encourage and equip them for greater personal maturity and more effective public ministry.
  - We commit to providing regular and consistent communication.
  - Those commitments all say, “we are with you...”
- ✓ **Some plans “work” and some plans “fail,”** but God always accomplishes His purposes
  - I've left out one important part about Paul's trip to Jerusalem (maybe you noticed).
  - In verse 24 he says, ***whenever I go to Spain....*** There is some question whether or not he made it. There is nothing in Scripture that tells us whether or not he did. Clement later wrote, “He [Paul] taught righteousness to all the world, and when he had reached the limits of the West he gave his testimony before the rulers, and thus passed from the world.” Spain seems to fit that phrase “limits of the West,” but that's only conjecture.
  - We do know however, that whether or not he got to Spain, things didn't work out just as he planned. After leaving Corinth in Acts 20, he went to Miletus where he met the Ephesian elders (20:17ff) and then went from there to Jerusalem (21:15ff), where he was quickly arrested.
    - ... He appeared before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23), endured a plot against his life, appeared before Felix (Acts 24) and then Festus and Agrippa (Acts 25-26).
    - ... While before Festus, he made an appeal to Caesar as a Roman citizen (25:11).
    - ... So after more than two years of waiting he was sent to Rome (Acts 27) and endured a shipwreck (Acts 28) before finally arriving in Rome as a prisoner (Acts 28:16) under house arrest for another two years.
    - ... He was then released and perhaps went to Spain, though there is no record in the Spanish church of his ever having been there.
  - This all is a reminder that we have desires for ministry and we make appropriate plans, and then we trust the Lord that whatever He does through us and wherever He leads us, we will be content and satisfied with how He chooses to use us — being willing to be used up in any way He designs for us to be used, even as Paul wrote from his Roman imprisonment (**Phil. 2:17-18**).

**BENEDICTION:** **Romans 15:13**