



I want you to try and guess what well-known university started with this mission statement: “To be plainly instructed and consider well that the main end of your life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ.” Founded in 1636, this university employed exclusively Christian professors, emphasized character formation in its students above all else, and placed a strong emphasis on equipping pastors to share the good news. Every diploma read, *Christo et Ecclesiae Veritas*, meaning “Truth for Christ and the Church.” You’ve probably heard of this school. It’s called Harvard University. Only 80 years after its founding, a group of New England pastors sensed Harvard had drifted too far for their liking. Concerned by the secularization at Harvard, they approached a wealthy person who shared their concerns. This man, Elihu Yale, financed their efforts in 1718, and they called the college Yale University. Yale’s motto was not just *Veritas* (truth) like Harvard, but *Lux et Veritas* (light and truth). In fact, 7 out of the 8 Ivy League schools were all started this way.

Today, Harvard’s and Yale’s legacy of academic excellence are still thriving. But neither school resembles what their founders envisioned, not even close. At the 350th anniversary celebration of Harvard Steven Muller, former president of Johns Hopkins University, bluntly stated, “The bad news is the university has become godless.” Larry Summers, the former president of Harvard confessed, “Things divine have been central neither to my professional nor to my personal life.” Harvard’s and Yale’s founders were unmistakably clear in their goals: academic excellence and Christian formation. Today, they do something very different from their founding purpose.

What happened to Harvard and Yale and many other organizations is called “Mission Drift.” Mission drift typically unfolds slowly. Like an ocean current, it carries organizations away from their core purpose and identity. And if we are not careful, mission drift can happen to any church, even our own. The pattern goes like this: one generation believes the gospel, the next assumes the gospel, and the following ends up denying the gospel. Just drive around the Bay Area and you’ll see beautiful and historic churches that were once thriving now struggling for survival and relevance.

So, what is the mission of the local church? Why are we all gathered here this morning? How do we keep from “mission drift”? Let me make it a little more personal: What is your mission and

purpose in life? What gets you out of bed in the morning? Is your dream for your life God’s dream for it?

For the last few weeks we’ve studied Romans 14 and the first half of chapter 15. And Paul has told the church in Rome to stop fighting over nonessential issues that were threatening to split the church. In other words he was saying, “Stop being distracted from your primary mission!” Why does he spend so much time telling them to stop fighting each other? Because internal strife and conflict within the church will inevitably lead to mission drift. As we look now at the second half of Romans 15, we’ll see Paul’s mission in life. And as we look at his life, I want us to consider how his ministry relates to your life’s mission and the mission of our church. Let’s begin with verses 14–22.

The Primary Mission of Paul was to Take the Gospel Into All the World

I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation. Rather, as it is written:

**“Those who were not told about him will see,
and those who have not heard will understand.”**

This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Paul starts verses 14 and 15 with almost an apology. Since he’s never even been to the church in Rome, he might be wondering if he has offended them by calling out their judgmental attitudes.

With keen pastoral wisdom, Paul says he's confident that God is at work in them. That they will in turn work out their differences and refocus themselves on their primary mission. He says that all he has been trying to do is remind them of their calling as the church. Paul then opens his heart to them about his past, present and future of his own ministry. By the grace of God, Paul was made a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. We know from the New Testament how Paul had a very unique ministry. He mentions three things about his ministry. He says it was priestly, it was powerful, and it was pioneering. Let's look at each one.

Paul's ministry was first priestly

Romans 12 taught us that all Christians must bring themselves and all they have to God as an offering. In response to God's work in Christ, we become "living sacrifices." Here, Paul sees his Gentile converts as his offering to God, "living sacrifices." Gentiles who were once excluded from temple worship have now become an offering acceptable to God. As an evangelist, Paul offered his converts to God as an act of worship. What we see here is a cycle between worship and witness. As Gentile converts began to worship God and connect to the church, they were equipped and sent out to proclaim the name of Jesus in the world. As more and more people responded to the gospel message, they too were offered to God as living sacrifices. And the cycle continues. John Stott says, "Worship leads to witness and witness leads to worship." If your worship on Sunday doesn't lead to witness on Monday through Saturday, then something is off.

A church starts to experience mission drift when Sunday becomes primarily about us and our own experience at church. Instead of leaving here and saying to ourselves, "Man, I feel so much better. I loved that one song Tim did and the sermon was so impactful," we say, "Thank you God for filling me up so that you can pour me out this week as I serve you." I want you to notice too that Paul's ministry was not just a duty for him to fulfill, it was his passion. He says, "It was a glory for him." Paul was passionate about reaching people far from God. Paul's ministry was priestly.

Paul's ministry was powerful

The Greek word for "power" is *dynamis*. We get the English word dynamite from it. Paul's ministry was confirmed with spiritual dynamite through the spirit of God. The power of Paul's ministry he says was evident in three ways: obedience, word and deed, and signs and wonders. Paul's desire was for Gentiles to not only come to faith, but that they would wholeheartedly obey God. Saving faith always leads to obedience. I talked a little about that last week but it's worth repeating. Religion says obey and God will accept you. Christianity says God accepts you so lovingly obey. We obey God out of our love for him, not duty. That means

the goal of evangelism, reaching people for Christ, is complete life change, not just saying the sinner's prayer.

Paul's ministry was powerful by "word and deed"

That means he not only proclaimed the gospel but shared his life with people. Like Jesus, he not only taught people, he invested in their lives, he got his hands dirty. You've heard the famous line, "Preach the gospel always and when necessary use words." The problem with that statement is to preach the gospel, you need words. You need to talk about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But, if that's all you do, your ministry will struggle. Like Paul, we also need the ministry of good works. We tell people the gospel and we live it with them. We feed bread to the poor and we tell them about the Bread of Life.

Paul's ministry was powerful because it was accompanied with signs and wonders

As one of the original Apostles, Paul had the unique authority to do miracles. He healed people and drove out demons. He was once even bitten by a poisonous snake and didn't die! I believe God can do anything he wants today. Yes, God still works miraculously. But, not in the same way as with the Apostles. Today, the Holy Spirit works primarily through his Word. That means if a rattlesnake bites me, I'll die if I don't get to a doctor ASAP! I'm not Paul! And that's why he reminds us of his true source of power. He did all this "through the power of the Holy Spirit." Man cannot heal; only God can. Paul even refused to brag about his ministry here. He kept saying, "this is what Christ did through me." Successful ministry is all God's work, but he incredibly chooses to use us! Paul's ministry was priestly, powerful and pioneering.

Paul's ministry was pioneering

Paul would have loved the Bay Area because he was an entrepreneur. He was a start-up guy. Paul was an urban church planter. He reminds the Roman church of his church planting ministry and summarizes almost ten years of ministry and three heroic missionary journeys, in just a few verses. Paul was a pioneer! He sought to take the gospel where it was not yet preached. He wanted to go to the hardest ground to plow in and he wanted to reach people far from God. Paul did that by planting churches in the major cities of the region. That's why he could say later, "My work is done there..." Not because everyone heard the gospel, but because there was a major missional outpost, a church, in several important cities. If Paul were alive today, I'm convinced he would come to the Bay Area to plant churches.

The question some of you are thinking is, "Should we all be like Paul, planting churches in urban cities?" No. He had a unique and special calling as an Apostle and missionary to the Gentiles. But, we are all called to make disciples of all nations. We all have a part to play in what God is doing all over the world. And

while there will never be another Paul, God has placed all of you here in the SF Bay Area for such a time as this. I know it's hard to live here—housing is cheap, slow pace of life, and super conservative! But underneath it all, people are hurting, lonely and lost. Sadly though, most Christians will never lead anyone to the Lord in their lifetime. Did you know that? A majority of Christians don't even have a handful of non-Christian friends anymore. The primary mission of Paul was to take the Gospel into all the world. How does God want to use you? One of the ways God wants to use you is by using your resources. That's what Paul highlights next.

The Early Church Felt a Responsibility to Give to Paul's Mission

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ (verses 23-29).

Paul has been focused on the spiritual needs of the church and now he turns to their social needs. Paul tells the church about the reasons for his travel plans. He intends to go from Corinth to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem to Rome, and from Rome to Spain. He'd roughly be covering 3000 miles all by foot and boat. He was a hardcore missionary! Let's briefly look at his plans for his three visits.

Paul first plans to visit Jerusalem

Even though Jerusalem was way out of his way, Paul insisted that he personally bring a financial gift from the Gentile churches to the Jewish Christian church in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church was most likely dealing with a serious famine and needed money for food, especially to feed the poor. Paul says a few personal things about this financial gift. First, the churches were "pleased to do it." Out of their love and concern for their brothers and sisters in Christ, they gave generously. Paul then says something really interesting. He says the Gentile churches "owed it to them." This gift was an obligation and duty. In Paul's thinking from spiritual blessings flow material blessings. Remember, Paul talked lots about the debt we owe the Jews in Romans 11. They

are the stump of the olive tree and we are the wild grafted in branches. Our salvation came from the Jews. In his thinking, Gentiles should have no problem giving sacrificially to the needs of the church in Jerusalem because they've been blessed spiritually. For us today, this means helping the poor is not an option, it's an obligation. That's what grace does. It makes us debtors to those in need.

After Jerusalem, he plans to visit Rome

Even though he's never been there, he longed to be with the believers there. He wanted to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. Rome was a strategic city and Paul wanted them to partner with him to reach the world with the gospel. He hoped they would "assist" him in his ministry. And more than that, he saw Rome as a stepping stone on his way to Spain.

After his time in Rome, Paul has plans to visit Spain

We don't know if he ever got there. But, what we do know from history is Paul would be arrested in Rome and beheaded there. My wife and I both lived in Spain during college at separate times, and let me tell you, it's a country that desperately needs Christian missionaries! It's a spiritually dark place and like most of Europe, is considered "post Christian." That's what happens to many countries where Christianity once flourished, but because of mission drift, the church lost its influence in that culture. Finally, Paul asked the Roman church to pray for him and his ministry.

Paul Asked the Church to Pray for the Mission

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen (verses 30-33).

Paul began the letter to Rome in chapter one by praying for believers there. He now ends the letter by asking for their prayers. For Paul, prayer is not simply something we do in the shower or before we go to bed. Prayer is a struggle. The word struggle is an athletic term of working together as a team to achieve victory. How is prayer a struggle? Paul could mean a few things. Prayer is for sure a struggle against the principalities and powers of evil. Ephesians 6:12 says, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* When we pray, we are battling unseen spiritual forces. On the other hand Paul could simply mean that prayer is the struggle. Serious prayer is hard work. It takes dedication and focus. I struggle to pray. It doesn't come naturally or easy for me at all. Or maybe Paul's just being honest and saying,

"Here are all my struggles and what I'm going through, so please pray for me." That makes sense, because he tells us three reasons why he needs prayer.

He wants them to pray so that he would be kept safe from unbelievers in Judea who want stop his ministry. Paul was in real danger. The Jewish elite and unbelievers did not like what Paul was doing. For some people, Paul was bad for business! Remember the guy in the book of Acts who had a business selling little religious idols? Paul comes along and ruins his business by preaching the gospel, a riot breaks out, and Paul is run out of town! The second reason Paul wants them to pray is so that the believers in Jerusalem would gladly accept the gift. In Paul's mind, it might be hard for Jewish Christians to accept financial help. Maybe because of pride? Maybe because Paul didn't have a great reputation within the Jewish community any longer? I'm not sure. But, if the gift was rejected, it could cause another major division between Gentiles and Jewish Christians. And the third reason he asked for prayer is so that he would actually get to Rome. He wanted things to go well in Jerusalem so that he could visit Rome, enjoy their company and be refreshed.

In all this, Paul wants God's will to be done. That's the heartbeat of his prayer and any prayer for that matter. We can join others in their struggle through prayer. We pray for safety as the gospel message goes out. We should be praying for pastors and missionaries. I hope you guys are praying for me, our staff, elders and our church; we need it. Paul then ends this chapter in verse 33 with another prayer and benediction.

As you can see, Paul was the greatest missionary of the Christian Church. And what happened back then continues today because Christianity is a missional faith. We have a message (the gospel) and a motive (love) for sharing the greatest news ever. G. K. Chesterton put it this way, "We do not want a church that will move with the world. We want a church that will move the world." We don't want to change culture, we want to create it. I think if Paul could help us apply this passage today, he'd say, the mission of the church is to **go, give and pray**.

First, go. Matthew 28:19-20, what we call the great commission, says, ***"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy***

Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." We gather to scatter. Like Paul, our primary mission in the world is to go make disciples. We want to make disciples who will make disciples.

Second, our mission is to give to God's work. There really is no greater way to test your commitment to Christ than by looking at where you spend your money. As Christians, we might not all be able to go into all the world, but we can give to the work of Christ in all the world. If you give to CPC, 10% of our giving goes directly to our mission partners and to mission work in the world. That means you are not giving **to** CPC, you are giving **through** CPC.

Finally, our mission is to pray. Prayer is not just for the mission, prayer **is** the mission. A church moves forward together on its knees. I really want us to be a praying church, a church that seeks God in all things. So, how does a church not experience mission drift? Like Paul, we stay laser-focused on our mission to go, give and pray. There will never be another Apostle Paul, but God has created you. How will you go this year? How will you give? How will you pray?

We have a few really nice tea sets at home that Missy's grandmother gave us right before she moved into a retirement home. They are really delicate, old and beautiful and they are displayed in a cabinet in our dining room. There's only one problem: we never really use them. We are afraid we would break them and we don't really have high tea! But, they're nice to look at and are a great reminder of grandma's love for us. But you know what? God's not looking for expensive tea sets. He's looking for tupperware people—the kind that can be used every day. He's looking for the kind of people that don't need to be tucked away in a china closet but can be sent out into a harsh world, carrying within them the life of Christ.

The church was never meant to be a china cabinet, where precious pieces could be safely stowed out of harm's way. The church was meant to be a working kitchen, where well-worn pots are filled again and again to pour out their life-giving contents to a thirsty world. So we go, we give, we pray.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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