

Gospel-Powered Partnerships Expand God's Reach

Text: Romans 15:22–29

In the home where I grew up, the chill of winter was kept at bay by the warmth of a wood fire. We had an amazing fireplace in the living room and an even more formidable wood-burning stove in the basement, a testament to my dad's handiwork. The wood came from our own 13 acres of land; we felled the trees, cut them into logs, and then split and stacked the wood ourselves. My dad certainly knew the value of having three boys when it came to stocking up on firewood.

I can still feel the weight of the axe in my hands, the echo of chopping wood filling the air. Splitting and hauling logs was often my task—a solitary, grueling duty that seemed to stretch on forever. Standing alone amidst the piles of wood, the task ahead often felt insurmountable.

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But there were those special days when it became a family affair—my dad, brothers, and sometimes friends would come over. My dad would invest in renting a hydraulic log splitter, and we'd all pitch in. Inside, my mom would be preparing a veritable feast, her way of contributing to the day's efforts. Those were the moments when the work felt lighter, even enjoyable. The camaraderie made the time pass quickly, and the shared laughter was as warm as the fire we were preparing for.

My dad's mission was always clear—secure enough wood for the winter. And I was a crucial part of that mission. By myself, the task was slow and arduous, but when joined by others, the burden lifted, and I felt invigorated and strong.

Maybe we independent Baptists could learn a thing or two from what I learned those many years ago.

Maybe we should be more about working together than separating over silly things.

Maybe it is more about cooperation than competition.

That's what Paul learned as he leveraged churches to help churches. It's amazing what God can accomplish when churches bless one another.

Main Idea: Churches Must Help Churches to Fulfill God's Mission

So how does this unfold in practice: Paul shares three significant thoughts regarding this idea...

1. Gospel-Powered Partners Work Together to Expand God's Kingdom (vs. 22-24)

Romans 15:22–24 ESV

²² This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Paul never was able, over the course of his ministry, to get to the church at Rome (vs. 22). He has been busy preaching the gospel and fulfilling the commission Jesus gave the disciples in [Acts 1:8](#)

Acts 1:8 ESV

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Paul’s commission from the Lord was to reach the Gentile nations with the Gospel. And that is what he did. Although his practice was to go into a city and find the Synagogue, preach the word, watch the explosion, and then minister to those who believed and who wanted to hear more, he would then turn his attention to the Gentiles in that town. This is at the heart of what he says in verse 22.

Obviously, Paul has not preached to every individual person from Jerusalem to Illyricum, but he has started reproducing churches throughout these areas that did, in fact, propagate the gospel and reach others for Christ. Remember what he said in verse 19?

Romans 15:19 ESV

¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;

Show Map...

And now that God had finished with him in these regions, Paul was not ready to be done! He was looking forward to what was next.

Romans 15:23–24 ESV

²³ But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

John Stott - *At first hearing this is a most surprising statement, for undoubtedly there were still many areas into which the gospel had not penetrated, and still multitudes of people who were not converted. But we must read Paul’s words in verse 23 in the light of his policy explained in verse 20. He means that there is no more room in Greece and its environs for his pioneer church-planting ministry, for that initial work has been done. **The Message of Romans 1. He Plans to Visit Rome (23–24)***

Paul’s desire was not only to visit Rome, but to evangelize the “outermost parts” of the earth. Which at that time, was Spain.

Spain Refers to the Iberian Peninsula, which includes modern-day Spain and Portugal. Rome would have been a strategic base for launching a missionary journey to Spain, which by the first century AD was part of the Roman Empire. Paul’s desire to push westward to the borders of the empire may have been motivated by certain OT passages (e.g., Isa 66:19–20; Ezek 36:22–28). It is unknown whether Paul reached Spain, though it is possible that he traveled there after his house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16–31). **Faithlife Study Bible Chapter 15**

Paul's hope was that when he visited the church at Rome, he would receive two things from them that would help him accomplish God's mission for the church. Fellowship and Assistance.

1. **Fellowship** – "...*once I have enjoyed your company for a while.*" We need each other. Fellowship is crucial for the survival of the individual and the body!
2. **Assistance for God's Mission** - John Stott...

*The verb translated assist (propempō) 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.² So the dictionary definition of propempō 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. **The Message of Romans 1. He Plans to Visit Rome (23–24)***

Why did the Lord establish and leave the church here?

To expand His Kingdom and thus bring Him more glory!

The job of this church is to expand the Kingdom of God.

One way we accomplish this is through Gospel-Powered Partners.

Paul loved the church in Rome even though he had never been there!

But he depended on the church in Rome to help propel him and his ministry to the outermost parts of the world.

What an amazing privilege for the church to be a part of the continuation and growth of the church.

I have this sign in my office that says,

"Be One, Make One!"

When is a disciple fully mature? When he or she reproduces themselves.

When is a church a healthy church? When it reproduces itself.

Paul was hoping the Church at Rome would invest itself in the church reproduction process.

Two questions arise from this.

1. Are you are a reproducing disciple of Christ?

2. Are we a reproducing church?

- a. Yes, we are - missions

- b. No, we are not - planting and revitalizing.
 - i. What do we need to become a church planting/revitalization church?

Review - Churches Must Help Churches to Fulfill God's Mission

- Gospel-Powered Partners Work Together to Expand God's Kingdom

2. Gospel-Powered Partners Actively Serve and Support Other Congregations (vs. 25-27)

So, Paul's hope is the church at Rome will help him reach Spain, but there is another example of congregations helping one another. Look at what Paul has to say in the next verses...

Romans 15:25–27 ESV

²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

Paul, before he goes to Rome and Spain, has some unfinished business to take care of. What business is it? Well, let's go back to some other Scriptures that will help us understand what's going on.

1 Corinthians 16:1–4 ESV

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. ³ And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

2 Corinthians 8:1–6 ESV

¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

So, the first thing to understand is the Church in Jerusalem was poor. Some speculate that their poverty was caused by a 'severe famine.' This was predicted by Agabus in [Acts 11:27](#)

Acts 11:27–29 ESV

²⁷ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world

(this took place in the days of Claudius).²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

Another consideration for the poverty of the Church in Jerusalem was persecution...

Regardless of the reason they were in poverty, Paul, in conjunction with these gentile churches in Asia, desired to help their sister church! They gave out of their poverty to help the church in Jerusalem!!

They lived out the very thing we saw happen in the first church in Jerusalem.

Remember in [Acts 4](#) when they shared everything with each other? This was before the church was dispersed - They took care of one another as a church.

"Contribution" renders koinōnia, which means a "common share" in anything, here in contributing to Paul's collection. - Stott

Now, they are caring not just for their own congregations but for churches who are struggling and in need.

You do remember our story as a church, right? How Pastor Bob had the wisdom and humility to ask other churches for help?

75-80% of churches like ours are in decline and closing. We have a responsibility to set a trajectory to help those that we can. We cannot have the mindset that they are independent churches, and so they are on their own.

Thank the Lord that First Baptist Church in Zeeland didn't have that attitude with us!

So, what can we do to prepare ourselves for this kind of church model?

First and foremost - We MUST be mature and healthy!

What is a healthy church?

"A healthy church is not a church that's perfect and without sin. It has not figured everything out. Rather, it's a church that continually strives to take God's side in the battle against the ungodly desires and deceits of the world, our flesh, and the devil. It's a church that continually seeks to conform itself to God's Word."

— **Mark Dever**, *What Is a Healthy Church?*

"A healthy church is a congregation that increasingly reflects God's character as his character has been revealed in his Word."

— **Mark Dever**, *What Is a Healthy Church?*

This corporate body is made up of individuals. And it is you, the individuals of this body, that will make the body healthy or sickly.

How is this so? By how you live your Christian life. Are you living it for yourself or Christ? Are you pursuing holiness or your personal happiness? Are you serving and loving one another or expecting to be served and loved?

Your individual spiritual health profoundly impacts the health of the whole!

Remember, healthy disciples **reproduce**, and healthy congregations **reproduce**.

We must do everything we can to be spiritually healthy both individually and corporately!

"You and all the members of your church, Christian, are finally responsible before God for what your church becomes, not your pastors and other leaders - you. Your pastors will stand before God and give an account for how they have led your congregation (Heb. 13:17). But every single one of us who is a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ will give an account for whether or not we have gathered together regularly with the church, spurred the church on to love and good deeds, and fought to maintain a right teaching of the hope of the gospel (Heb. 10:23-25)."
— **Mark Dever**, *What Is a Healthy Church?*

This means you must be a vested, involved, contributing member of this body in order for this body to be healthy. Yes, I said member.

I've heard of men and women dating for 5, 8, 10 years without taking the step of marriage. I assume they are enjoying all the benefits of marriage without the commitment.

Don't treat Christ's church this way. Don't date her for years without a formal, public commitment. If you can't commit to her, find a body that you can.

We need committed members who will serve faithfully as they grow spiritually.

What does it look like here at ABC?

Submit yourself to regular attendance for the purpose of worship and preaching.

"A Christian who willingly forsakes fellowship with other believers will inevitably be without genuine, Spirit-given joy. It is impossible to live faithfully or happily apart from fellow believers in Christ." - MacArthur

Submit yourself to being a part of a connection group, equipping class, and family chat.

Submit yourself to serving in an area where you can use your gifts and grow this body.

- We have ministries that are suffering because people won't join this body and serve in the areas they are gifted. Brothers and sisters, Church is not a buffet where you get to pick and choose what brings you fulfillment.
- Church is a respite from WAR where we encourage one another and build each other up in our most holy faith.
- Why wouldn't you want to serve in the youth ministry to help those younger survive the onslaught of worldly influence they are inundated with every hour of every day?

- Why wouldn't you want to walk alongside the children of our church to help them understand the basics of our Faith?
- Why wouldn't you want to put yourself out and help in any way possible, using the gifts God has entrusted to you to ensure the overall health of this body?
- Isn't Christ's bride worth it to you?

And as we pursue these things, we will grow healthier and healthier so that we can reproduce, revitalize, and help other bodies not only survive but thrive.

Review - Churches Must Help Churches to Fulfill God's Mission

- Gospel-Powered Partners Work Together to Expand God's Kingdom
- Gospel-Powered Partners Actively Serve and Support Other Congregations

3. Gospel-Powered Partners Cultivate Spiritual Growth to Bless and Strengthen Multiple Congregations (vs. 28-29)

Romans 15:28-29 ESV

²⁸ When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Paul was a busy missionary, Pastor, and church planter. The accomplishments of this man are breathtaking. And he wasn't finished. Paul was always about edifying, building, discipling, and helping people and congregations grow into Christlikeness.

Show Map

He felt compelled to deliver the offering/assistance to Jerusalem which he had gathered from various Gentile churches. This was 2000 miles out of his way, and then head to Rome and then Spain because he was hoping to "preach the gospel in regions beyond you" ([2 Cor 10:16](#)).

Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans during his stay in Corinth, around AD 56-58. After sending the letter, he traveled to Jerusalem, which is when he was arrested, as Luke recounts in [Acts 21](#). This arrest would lead to his eventual transfer to Rome as a prisoner, where the book of Acts concludes with Paul under house arrest, awaiting trial before Caesar.

Did he make it to Spain? I don't know. He made it to Rome, but not in the way he hoped, I'm sure.

But what I want you to notice is not what happened to Paul, but what his intentions are.

He plans to personally bless the church in Jerusalem -

He plans to leave for Spain, stopping at Rome first -

He plans to bless them and to bless the world - the word for ***blessing*** in verse 29 could also be translated ***gospel***.

Paul wants to bless them with the fullness of the Gospel of Christ.

Frankly, is there a better blessing that could be given than the gospel?

Paul, after expounding the gospel to the church in Rome in this letter, wants the privilege to get together with the church and strengthen them with more about the gospel.

Friends, there is something profound you must understand here.

The gospel is enough.

The gospel is enough not only to bless us but also to strengthen our congregation and those around us.

1 Corinthians 1:23–24 ESV

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

2 Timothy 4:2 ESV

² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Listen, friends, the gospel is enough! We need not focus our energy on gimmicks or worldly strategies to introduce people to Christ or have them grow in Christ. The gospel is enough!

The gospel is enough for your justification - The good news of the gospel, which centers on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, serves as the sole foundation for our justification.

It is through Christ's sacrificial act on the cross that we are made righteous before God, not by our own deeds or moral standing.

Justification is an act of God where He declares a sinner to be righteous because of the righteousness of Christ.

This righteousness is imputed to us the moment we believe in Jesus Christ and His work for us. As Paul writes in [Romans 3:24](#), *"and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*

In this, the gospel reveals that it is sufficient and complete; nothing needs to be added to Christ's finished work for our legal standing before God.

Believers are justified entirely by grace through faith in the gospel, a truth that provides immense peace and assurance.

The gospel is enough for your sanctification - The gospel does not just rescue us from the penalty of sin; it also empowers us to overcome the power of sin in our daily lives.

Sanctification is the process by which we are made holy, becoming more like Christ in our thoughts, words, and actions.

This transformative process is initiated by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. The same grace that justifies a believer also sanctifies them. As believers focus on the truths of the gospel and their identity in Christ, they grow in holiness. This is not a work they do by their strength but one that the Spirit accomplishes within them as they walk in obedience to the word of God. Paul illustrates this in [Galatians 2:20](#), saying, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

The gospel is sufficient for sanctification because it is the means by which God applies the work of Christ to our lives, making us into His likeness progressively and surely.

Paul’s passion was to start many congregations that found their sufficiency in Christ and his gospel. Because he knew that if he did, they, in turn, would start other congregations that do the same.

We should demand this of ourselves for ourselves, and we should do what we can to help other congregations reach the same goal. We cannot be content to hole up and hide here until the Lord returns. We must be strengthened so we can strengthen.

This was Paul, and it must be us as well.

Who pursued you with the gospel that led to your salvation and growth in Christ? Many people were involved in your process. Many people still are.

Think about it. There were people who made seeming off-handed comments to you about Christ that sunk deep into your soul and prepared you for the day that someone would “set the hook and bring you in.”

God used many “links in the chain” for your salvation. And He is using more links in the chain for your progressive sanctification. Who are they?

For me, after I came to Christ, God provided Paul Parker from Parkers Trophies in Muskegon. I would go to his business once per week, Bible in tow, and he would walk me through the basics of Biblical truth and Christianity.

I can never thank Paul enough for that precious time and information he gave me. And there were many, many, more Paul’s that came into my life. God placed them right at the right time to help me to grow in just the way God intended for me to do so.

I know this is true for you as well. Who planted seeds in your life? Who prayed for your salvation? Who reeled you in with the gospel? Who disciplined you? Who is discipling you?

Bigger question? Who are you discipling - strengthening in their faith?

Bigger, bigger questions? Who are we helping as a church? How are we preparing ourselves to help other churches in need?

We need to stop competing with like-faith churches and start praying for and working with them. The darker the culture gets, the more we will need each other. Just like the Church in Jerusalem needed the help and encouragement from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia!

If we are ever going to be a church that helps other churches, and I truly believe that is what God wants, we must become excellent at strengthening and encouraging one another!

So, who are you investing in for the Church and God's Kingdom?

Who are you speaking into - even if it is in seemingly simple ways?

Who are you prayerfully, actively evangelizing?

Who are you intentionally helping to grow in their faith?

Every one of us should have at least one of each.

EVERY ONE OF US!

If you do not, you are walking in disobedience. You really are because God is clear in His word that his disciples are to make disciples!

So, if you don't have anyone, what will you do about that?

Repent and start!

Review - Churches Must Help Churches to Fulfill God's Mission

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Conclusion

Whenever I reflect on those days of chopping wood at my parents' house by myself, a tinge of discouragement creeps in.

Yet, when I recall the camaraderie and joy shared with my dad and brothers, I am so encouraged!

In the same spirit, we are called to be a church with a vision that transcends our own walls—a church that is vibrant, multiplying, and outward-looking.

This vision isn't just a distant dream; it must be the engine that propels everything we do, shaping our actions and our purpose here.

Our community, our city, our state—they hunger for the hope that is found in Jesus.

What if we took up the mantle of Paul, extending our reach and planting new churches to fill this need? Imagine us not only flourishing ourselves but also revitalizing struggling churches, enhancing their testimony of the Gospel.

Perhaps you might feel the call to be a part of this movement, to go and be the lifeblood of these congregations.

The possibilities before us are as vast, but they require our commitment. We must become faithful disciples who are actively making disciples. If we fail in this, we risk joining the sobering statistic I shared earlier—75-80% of churches in decline, shutting their doors.

They forgot their 'why,' but we must remember ours.

We exist to serve, to grow, to love, and to bring the good news to all who will hear. Let us not just be a statistic but a testament to what God can do through a church fully alive to His mission.

Remember – Gospel Powered Partnerships Expand God’s Reach!

Connection Group Reflection Questions

1. In what practical ways can we, as individual believers and as a church, collaborate with other congregations to broaden our reach and impact in spreading the Gospel? (vs. 22-24)
2. Can we identify a need within another local congregation or ministry where we could offer support, and how might we go about providing that assistance while honoring both communities? (vs. 25-27)
3. What steps can we take to not only grow spiritually within our own church walls but also to encourage and contribute to the spiritual health and growth of nearby churches or those farther afield? (vs. 28-29)
4. Who are you praying for daily?
5. Who are you engaging with weekly?
6. Who are you sharing the gospel with monthly?