



# Plans & Providence

Romans 15:14-33<sup>1</sup>



## Looking Back - Paul's Ministry

- ❑ In Romans 15:14, Paul begins to conclude his letter to the Romans. Read Romans 15:14-22.
- ❑ After acknowledging the general goodness and knowledge of the Christians in Rome, Paul gives reasons for writing “quite boldly on some points” (15:14-15). First of all, they need to be “reminded” again. (We all do!) Secondly, it is Paul’s special calling. God has “set apart” Paul to boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (15:15-16; cf. 1:1).<sup>2</sup>
- ❑ Paul uses “priestly” language to describe his ministry. “Proclaiming the good news” is his “priestly duty” (15:16). Paul’s priestly duty is different from the Old Testament priests. Paul’s “offering” is the fruit of his labors – the Gentiles who have responded to the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

### Reflection

- In a sense, all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:9), and have a priestly duty. What is *your* priestly duty? Of course, our primary “offering” should be our lives (see Romans 12:1).
- ❑ As Paul reflects on his ministry, he “glories” (or “has found reason for boasting”) (15:17).
  1. Do you think Paul is boasting in his own achievements?<sup>4</sup> (15:17-19a) If not, in what way is he boasting? How does it relate to what he has “said and done?”<sup>5</sup> What can we learn from Paul’s example?
- ❑ Paul defines the general regions of his ministry thus far.<sup>6</sup> In these regions, he has completed his mission. He says, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known” (15:20a, NIV).<sup>7</sup> So now Paul plans to go farther west to preach the gospel there.

### Reflection

- What is *your* greatest ambition? How does it compare or relate to Paul’s ambition?

<sup>1</sup> We are skipping over Romans 15:1-13 (which is a continuation of chapter 14). In general, these verses command believers to avoid self-centeredness, and rather seek the good of others, following the example of Christ. We must listen to Scripture, seek unity in Christ, accept one another, and praise God together. Thus we will glorify God. We will be filled with all joy and peace as we trust in Him, and overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Paul is “the apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews)” (11:13). Jesus Christ said that Paul “is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15, NIV).

<sup>3</sup> Paul may have in mind the fulfillment of Isaiah 66:19-20. “And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD” (66:20a).

<sup>4</sup> Paul says, “I glory in Christ Jesus” (15:17a, emphasis added). Elsewhere he writes, “But, ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends” (2 Corinthians 10:17-18 NIV; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:31; Jeremiah 9:23-24).

<sup>5</sup> His emphasis is on “what Christ has accomplished.” Christ has accomplished his work through Paul. Christ has used Paul’s words and actions (*logō kai ergō*) and the power of the Holy Spirit. As believers, we need to be faithful in our words *and* actions, but true success is God’s accomplishment, and the glory should go to Him.

<sup>6</sup> “from Jerusalem to Illyricum” – Illyricum was located northwest of Macedonia, in the area now occupied by Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, and northern Albania.

<sup>7</sup> Paul does not want to “build on someone else’s foundation.” There is nothing wrong with doing that, but it is not Paul’s calling. Paul was a foundation builder. Elsewhere Paul said, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God makes it grow,” and “I laid a foundation...and someone else is building on it” (1 Corinthians 3:6, 10).

## Looking Forward - Paul's Plans

- ❑ In verse 23, Paul begins to share his future plans. Read Romans 15:23-33.
- ❑ For many years, Paul has wanted to visit the Christians in Rome (15:23; 1:10-11), but his ministry has not allowed it. But now, he plans to extend his mission into Spain. So he plans to visit Rome on the way. He also hopes that the church in Rome will support his mission.<sup>8</sup>
- ❑ *But first...!* Paul interrupts himself with his more immediate plans (15:25). He plans to go to Jerusalem for a special ministry. Paul plans to deliver “a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (15:26).<sup>9</sup> (*This is a major detour between Corinth and Rome!*)
  2. In what ways is this contribution important?<sup>10</sup> (15:26-27)

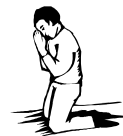
### Reflection

- Speaking of this contribution elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> Paul said, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7, *ESV*). What is your attitude toward giving?



## Looking Forward - Paul's Prayer Request

- ❑ Paul urges the believers in Rome to join him in his struggle by praying for him (15:30).
  3. In what way can we “join other people in their struggles” by praying?
- ❑ Paul asks them to pray: 1) that he would be rescued from the unbelievers in Jerusalem; 2) that his service (contribution) would be accepted by the Jewish believers; and 3) as a result, by God’s will, that he would get to Rome and experience joy and refreshment (15:31-32).
- ❑ What happened to Paul? After arriving in Jerusalem, the Jewish unbelievers attempted to kill him, but the Roman authorities rescued him by taking him into custody and putting him in prison (Acts 21:26-36; 23:12-23). Eventually Paul got to Rome, but as a prisoner (28:11-16).
  4. How were Paul’s prayers answered?<sup>12</sup> What can we learn about planning and praying?



### Reflection/Application

- As Paul looked back, he saw God’s work in and through his life. As he looked forward, he trusted in God’s guidance and care. Because of this, Paul had a great sense of meaning, purpose, peace and joy. Do you need to submit your life to God through faith in Jesus Christ?

<sup>8</sup> “have you assist (*propempō*) me” (15:24b) – The word *propempō* could mean “to help on one’s journey with food, money, by arranging for companions, means of travel, etc.” (BAGD, p. 709).

<sup>9</sup> This contribution was collected from the (mostly Gentile) believers in Macedonia and Achaia (basically modern Greece and southern Albania); which included the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, it helped those in need. It also helped promote unity between Gentile and Jewish Christians. It signified the Gentile believers’ appreciation of the Jewish Christians, from whom they had received spiritual blessings (15:27). As “grafted in” branches, the Gentiles should appreciate the “nourishing sap from the root” (11:17-18).

<sup>11</sup> Paul wrote concerning this contribution in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and especially in 2 Corinthians 8-9. Ideally, our giving should not be “under compulsion” from others, but rather be motivated by love in the Spirit, and God’s glory.

<sup>12</sup> Read Acts 21:17-28:31 for the whole story. Paul was rescued from the unbelievers, but only by being imprisoned by the Romans for two years. The collection was apparently received, at least by some (21:17; 24:17). Paul did get to Rome, but as a prisoner. However, he still experienced some joy and refreshment (Phil. 1:12-19; 2:25-30). Paul’s plans and prayers did not work out like he thought they would. But he submitted everything to “God’s will” (Rom. 15:32). Paul trusted in God’s “providence” (God’s sovereign guidance and care, according to His good purposes).