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Romans 15: The Final Appeal to Unity

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Chapter 15 A Final Call for Unity

It is always difficult to give up one's rights and privileges, but even more so when asked to give up what one likes or enjoys so as not to create an offence for someone that you may only marginally like personally. Is this asking too much? Are we willing to yield to the legalistic brother in our church in order to not encourage him not to violate his conscience? How much are we willing to give up for the sake of unity in the Body of Christ? David described this biblical principle in Ps 133:1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for the brothers to dwell together in unity!" What is the intent of Jesus in John 10:16 and Rev 21:1-4?

A general theme throughout the epistles is the need to overcome any cultural hang-ups or dislikes of each other over ethnic or cultural differences in order to build unity (Read Col 3:11-14 in the context of cultural dislikes, and ethnic prejudices which were rampant in the early churches).

I. The Local Church Unity (15:1-13)

God has revealed in the Scriptures His great concern for the unity of the local churches and the global Body of Christ. This unity is primarily expressed in our commitment to each other as we overcome any natural ethnic disdain for different kinds of people.

A. A call to the *strong* to support the *weak* (15:1-4)

^{NET} **Rom 15:1** But we who are **strong** ought to bear with the failings of the **weak**, and not just **please ourselves**.

² Let each of us **please** his neighbor for his good to build him up.

³ For even Christ did not please himself, but just as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

⁴ For everything that was written in former times was written for our **instruction**, so that through **endurance** and through **encouragement** of the scriptures we may have hope.

15:1 The unity of the church is impossible if everyone seeks to please himself. Paul's use of the first person ("we") implies that he considered himself a "strong" believer (14:14). The original text puts the emphasis on "ought" (*opheilo*, "to owe money, be in debt for"), which is used in by John in the following verses. What ought we to do here?

1 John 2:6

1 John 3:16

1 John 4:11

- In this text we are to "**bear**" with the failings of the weak (*bastazo*, present tense: "continually..." "take up carry with the hands, to bear what is burdensome, uphold"). It is used of a "yoke" of obligations in Acts 15:10. To bear the "**failings**" (*asthenema*, "weakness, incapability, as the result of a conscience being bound to legalistic requirements, scruples," FRIBERG) of the weak. The Jewish believers

could not eat unclean food¹ and when they joined churches of Gentiles who had a total disregard for any dietary or cultural norms of the Jewish believers, they were continuously offended constantly. In such a circumstance, how would you practice Phil 2:3-4?

- The strong believer understands both sides of the culture and convictions, then commits himself to never let his liberty limit or destroy the possibility of ministering to someone with different convictions. The strong never should despise the weak for their lack of maturity and discernment. The strong always gives up more of his liberties instead of demanding that the weak change. Though we are free to do whatever is not a violation of a NT command, there is a higher priority: never to do anything that would cause a disillusion, discouragement or harm to the conscience of another young believer. What was the problem in Philippi apparently among the leadership according to Phil 2:21?

15:2 Especially the strong must live to “please his neighbor for his good.” To “please” others (*aresko*, present-imperative, “continually or habitually...” “to accommodate one’s self to the opinions, desires and interests of others”) is a command. Notice Paul did not exclude himself, even though he was an apostle! The objective of “pleasing” his neighbor was not to pamper him, but that it would result in his “edification” (*oikodome*, “building up,” metaphorically, “the act of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness,” THAYER). This is similar to the earlier command in 14:19, “Let us pursue ...the building up of one another.” What was Paul’s priority in these verses?

1 Cor 10:23

2 Cor 12:19

Eph 4:11-12

Eph 4:29

1 Thes 5:11

15:3 Christ is our model of selflessness and building up others. Christ did not take advantage of His position or authority to please himself. He allowed his neighbors to cast “reproaches” at Him (*oneidismos*, “unjustifiable verbal abuse inflicted by others, insults,” FRIBERG). Can you explain the “mind-set” of Christ in the comparison of this passage with Phil 2:5-8?

15:4 The OT narratives present positive and negative models “for our instruction.” The submission to, and willingness to learn from, the inspired record marks one as a wise person. Even though the ceremonial rites are no longer obligated for the NT believer, the narratives of sacrifice, faith, selfishness and foolishness present applicable truths today. How does 1 Cor 10:6, and 11 teach us how to value the OT narratives?

¹For example, mammals that both chew their cud and have cloven hooves are clean or kosher, but animals that have only one of these two characteristics are prohibited (Lev 11:3-8); fish must have fins and scales (Lev 11:9-12); shellfish and non-fresh water fauna are unclean. Furthermore, the manner of the animal slaughter is critical or the meat cannot be eaten. There are rules about insects, milk products, cooking technique, blood, and other traditions.

- Two benefits of the study of Scriptures are “**endurance**” (*hupomone*, “steadfastness, a characteristic of a man who is not deterred from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and suffering,” THAYER) and “**encouragement**” (*paraklesis*, “exhortation, strong and persistent request, appeal, entreaty”). These would result in “hope” just as God intervened in the OT or was with them in the midst of difficulties, so He is with us in the midst of our challenges and problems today. How were the OT texts used in these verses?
Heb 12:5
Heb 13:6

B. A call to the church to bond in unity (15:5-6)

^{NET} **Rom 15:5** Now may the God of **endurance** and **comfort** give you **unity** with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus,
⁶ so that together you may with one voice **glorify** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15:5 The same two words are used here as coming from God, but previously the source for endurance and comfort was the OT (in v. 4), for the objective of Jewish and Gentile believers to be able to create a unity of loving commitment to one another. **Unity** is not superficial formalism, nor conformity to doctrinal standards, but rather having the same view of the Christian life: to live to please, benefit and serve each other without selfish interests. It was the disagreement about non-essential things that was so divisive in the early church. Look up the following verses and attempt to define the oneness mandate:
Rom 12:16
1Cor 1:10
Phil 2:2

15:6 The real goal in the church is not to please other believers, but primarily to please the Lord both individually and corporately, both inwardly and outwardly, with “one voice” or “common consent” (in Acts 2:26). Anything that destroys the unity of the Body must be dealt with quickly. Paul is insinuating that oral worship without this unity is meaningless to God. This Jewish-Gentile conflict is only an example to understand that any sacrifice of the stronger believer is worth it to create a unity in the church. What priority is given in the following verses?
Phil 4:2
1 Pet 3:8
Col 3:14-15

C. A call to the Jews and Gentiles to accept one another (15:7-13)

This passage ends the major theological section of the epistle to the Roman believers. This will become the fourth major principle for maintaining or insisting on the unity of the church: The shared eternal purpose of Christ’s redemption. In this passage the positive focus is on the overall mutual commitment of all believers to each other, in three areas: (1) Acceptance of different kinds of believers, (2) biblical precedence of God’s plan for the Gentiles and Jews, and (3) a closing prayer for the sharing of joy and peace together.

^{NET} **Rom 15:7** Receive one another, then, just as Christ also received you, to God’s glory.

- ⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a **servant of the circumcised** on behalf of **God's truth to confirm** the promises made to the fathers,
- ⁹ and thus the Gentiles **glorify** God for his mercy. As it is written, "Because of this I will **confess** you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praises to your name."
- ¹⁰ And again it says: "**Rejoice**, O Gentiles, with his people."
- ¹¹ And again, "**Praise** the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him."
- ¹² And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, and the one who **rises to rule** over the Gentiles, in him will the Gentiles hope."
- ¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace **as you believe in him**, so that you may **abound in hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.

15:7 In a summary fashion, Paul concludes his previous instructions with one overarching command: "Receive" one another (*proslambano*, present imperative, "Keep on..." - "to take to one's self, receive into one's home, grant one's access to one's heart," THAYER). It was used in Acts 18:26 when Priscilla and Aquila, with great tact, "*took aside*" Apollos "and explained to him the way of God more accurately." It is the same word that Paul wrote to Philemon to exhort him to "accept** (*proslambano*) Onesimus, his runaway slave, as you would me (Philemon 17). Paul opened this discussion with the same command (14:1, 3). How would you define the standard or depth of this acceptance according to this verse?**

- The goal of the Christian life is to become Christ-like. Paul made it clear that the Lord Jesus accepted us when we were "powerless" (5:6 or "weak"), "ungodly" (5:6), a "sinner" (5:8), and "enemies" (5:10). Surely Christians can accept one another even with non-essential differences. In the following verses Christ's example is our model as well:
Eph 4:32—5:2
Eph 5:25
Col 3:13
- God's eternal plan of redemption was established to bring glory to God. Everything He does is for God's glory – and everything His children do should likewise be to and for His glory. We are commanded in 1 Cor 6:20, "For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body." It is particularly the corporate goal of the church as seen in Eph 3:20-21, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, **to Him be the glory in the church...**" Note: "in the church," that is, how the church overcomes natural instincts and cultural attitudes to bond together. It takes the power of God to act biblically, especially when our instincts want us to act selfishly

15:8-9 God's plan from the beginning has been to bring Jews and Gentiles together into His kingdom. Paul now will refer back to the OT to prove this purpose. Jesus became a "**servant**" (*diakonos*, "a person who renders helpful service to others," as the word *deacon*) of the Jews, "**on behalf of**" (*huper*, "in defense of, in the name of") the truth of God. According to these verses Christ had a two-fold mission. Can you name them?

- (1)
- (2)

- The Word of God is so important to Jesus that He came, He lived and He died to fulfill it in every detail. Oh, that this would be our passion as well! He came to “confirm” (*bebaioo*, aorist, “to establish, make sure, to make good”) the promises given to the fathers. The fact that He would do this **just because He said He would** at enormous price to Himself, gives us great confidence that He will fulfill His promises for our future together with Him and all the other believers, even Gentile believers. The Jewish believers praised God for His truth or promises confirmed, and Gentile believers praise God for His mercy by including them in His family.
- God made His covenants only with Israel (Rom 9:4), not with the Gentiles (Eph 2:12), so Christ had no promises to fulfill to the Gentiles, but rather it was His purpose to bless the Gentiles through Israel (Gen 12:3; see also John 4:22).

15:10-12 The focus on a united (Jew and Gentile) worship and praise are seen as the ultimate goal of redemption with the reiteration of four OT passages that clearly declare God’s heart for the world. Paul quotes David (15:9), Moses (15:10), the psalmist (15:11) and Isaiah (15:12).

- The OT presented the Gentiles as the recipients of the blessing of God’s acceptance through faith, but never as “heirs together with Israel, members together...” (Eph 3:6). This is a NT revelation that was a challenge for the Jewish believers to accept.

15:13 The concluding doctrinal and exhortation remarks are like a benedictory prayer. The concept of the “God of hope” reflects back on all that had been describe as the future of the believer (Jew and Gentile) from 8:30 to this conclusion. In spite of the differences, Paul asks that God fill them with joy and peace (two of the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23). Joy comes from the anticipation of one’s hope fulfilled (Heb 12:2; James 1:2; 1 Pet 1:3) and peace comes from the assurance that God will fulfill those hopes (Rom 5:1; Phil 4:7). The key to this inner richness is “as you believe in him,” that is to trust fully in His Word (See Heb 11:1). How does 1 Peter 1:8 fit in this context?

- The phrase “indescribable and glorious joy” (1 Pet 1:8) is a magnificent description of the Spirit’s ministry in the believer. The purpose of the filling of the Spirit here is to “abound in hope” by the power of the Holy Spirit. This a corporate experience in this context as the Spirit works out the understanding and fortitude for present unity and future anticipation of unimaginable shared glory in the kingdom of our Lord.

II. Concluding Remarks for the Universal Church Unity (15: 14-33)

Paul always wrote a conclusion to his epistles, but the epilogue of Romans is especially long. The first part of this conclusion is Paul’s personal plans (15:14-21) and his five-fold strategy for his future ministry (15:22-33). His boldness in confronting their issues is now mellowed with encouragement and transparency.

A. Paul's confidence that they will follow his example (15:14-16)

Paul details his objective of maturing the establishment of the churches so that they would demonstrate the separation from the world such that would the Jewish Christians would be honored to be a member of such a church. Paul is defending his ministry to the Gentiles, confident that they would respond to the admonitions taught from the Word of God.

^{NET} **Rom 15:14** But I myself am fully **convinced** about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of **goodness**, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.

¹⁵ But I have written more boldly to you on some points so as to remind you, because of the grace given to me by God

¹⁶ to **be a minister** of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. I serve the gospel of God like a **priest**, so that the Gentiles may become **an acceptable offering**, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

15:14 Probably directed these comments at the Jewish Christians in Rome, Paul

explains his objective in ministering to Gentiles. Paul was "**convinced**" (*peitho*, perfect passive, "I have been" – "persuaded, be won over") that the Roman Christians would understand and instruct each other in the principles Paul had established. Paul was sure they were full of "**goodness**" (*agathosune*, "uprightness of heart and life," THAYER) and **knowledge** (or wisdom) (perfect tense, thus "having been filled with all knowledge," at least in a general sense sufficient to understand the principles to apply to practical life) and "**competent**" (*dunamai*, "be able to do something, be capable") to "**instruct**" one another (*nouthetein*, "to counsel, admonish"). The word is derived from the word for mind, *nous*, so it has to do with the planting of biblical principles to guide their thoughts and values. Applying the revealed Word of God through admonish-teaching is the key to the maturity of the church. Without a systematic teaching of the Word of God the churches cannot mature. How did the church at Colossi apply these ministries?

Col 1:28

Col 3:16

15:15-16 Paul could be very bold on important issues. From his beginning Luke described Paul's ministry as he "had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus" (Acts 9:27). This was a characteristic of his ministry. Here he is writing "**boldly**" (*polmeroteron*, a comparative adverb, "rather freely, speak freely, grow confident, daring") about "some sort" (KJV) or "on some points" (NIV, NET, NKJ) to indicate the special importance of what he is writing.

- The "**Reminding**"- Ministry (*epanamimnesko*, present active: "continually or habitually..." "to recall to mind again") is one of the core responsibilities of the teacher-preacher. This concept gives importance to the Bible study principle (or hermeneutic) that repeated concepts are very important. What are the things that they are to help believers to remember in these verses?

1 Tim 4:6

2 Pet 1:12-13,15

2 Pet 3:1-2

Jude 15

- The expressions of this passage (esp. v. 16) are familiar expressions to the Jewish priesthood, thus the target recipients appear to be mostly Jewish. The "grace" given

to Paul refers to his special ministry as a “**minister**” (*leitourgon*, “a public minister, servant of the state, or one busied with holy things”) to the Gentiles as a priest offering up, not animal sacrifices, but through the public proclamation of the gospel, the recipients of this gospel ministry would become in turn Paul’s offering to his Savior. These Gentile converts would be sanctified or made holy by the presence and indwelling Spirit of God in each Gentile believer. Paul’s passion for evangelism was to win the Gentile people to Christ so that he could present them personally to Christ as his thanksgiving offering for what Christ had done for him. This is a Jewish way of thinking about evangelism. A missionary would think of winning an unreached people group to Christ, in order to present them to Christ as his special offering, fulfilling the desire of Jesus’ will. Who would not like to present to Christ one of the people groups in these passages?

Rev 5:9

Rev 7:9

B. Paul’s general philosophy of ministry (15:17-22)

^{NET} **Romans 15:17** So I **boast** in Christ Jesus about the things that pertain to God.

¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ **has accomplished through me** in order to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed,

¹⁹ in the **power** of signs and wonders, in the **power** of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem even as far as Illyricum I have **fully preached** the gospel of Christ.

²⁰ And in this way I desire to preach where Christ has not been named, so as not to build on another person's foundation,

²¹ but as it is written: “Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.”

15:17-18 Paul could “boast” (*kauchesis*, “pride, glorying”) in something, yet refused to “boast” in others. Of what did Paul “boast” in according with these verses and in what could he not boast?

Rom 15:18

2 Cor 1:12

2 Cor 8:24

1 Thess 2:19

James 4:16

- The thrill of Paul’s life was to see God work through his ministry transforming lives, but to exaggerate or invent supernatural occurrences to appear more spiritually powerful, he “**dare not**” (*tolmao*, “to dread or shun through fear, presume”) speak, but only what God had “**accomplished**” (*katergazomai*, “performed, achieved”) through Paul in “word and deed.” The powerful “word” that Paul preached was the gospel which unleashes the “power of God” (Rom 1:16) to work in the sinner bringing about conviction, understanding, and faith. This is why Paul bragged about what God did in bringing people to Christ in faith. Here are the words that God used mightily:

Acts 14:15

Acts 26:18

- The second kind of powerful manifestation was “deeds” to bring about the “obedience” of the Gentiles, which will be more describe in the next verses. The idea of making the Gentiles “**obedient**” (*hupakoe*, “compliance, submission ... rendered to anyone’s counsels”) was a synonym for coming to Christ (ZUCK) as in Rom 1:5; 16:26. What are men commanded to do in these verses?

Acts 5:32

Acts 17:30

2 Thess 1:8

1 Peter 4:17

15:19 Paul describes the special “deeds” that God did through him to demonstrate his apostolic authority through two types of “**power**” (*dunamis*, “capacity for special ability, also supernatural manifestations”):

- (1) Power of “**signs**” (*semeion*, “a thing is distinguished from others, wonders by which God authenticates the men sent by him;” “miracles that signify theological truths” THAYER) and “**wonders**” (*teras*, “something so strange as to cause it to be ‘watched’ or ‘observed’” THAYER or “arouses close observation, only in the plural in the NT” FRIBERG). The uniqueness of Paul’s apostolic ministry that made him distinct from other Early Church leaders was the apostle’s Spirit given ability to exhibit supernatural manifestations on demand, in order to demonstrate the divine authority of their message. How do these verses indicate this unique characteristic of the apostolic ministry?

2 Cor 12:12

Heb 2:3-4

- (2) Power of the Spirit. This phrase is only used here and in Luke 4:14 describing Jesus’ ministry; however, Paul prayed that the believers would all experience the joy, peace and hope through the “power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13). All believers are promised this power of the Spirit. The following are the five key verses that deal the power of the Spirit in the believer’s life. Write what each contributes to our understanding of the power of the Spirit:

Acts 1:8

1 Cor 2:4 (compare with Rom 1:16)

Eph 3:16

1 Thes 1:5 (compare with Rom 1:16)

2 Tim 1:7

- This is the only expression of “fully preached” in the NT. This phrase has given rise to the “Full-Gospel” concept which supposedly must include “signs and wonders.” However, the word “fully” (*pleroo*, “to cause to abound, to complete, to carry through to the end, to accomplish”) is not a description of the type of ministry, but a geographical description of the accomplishment of Paul’s mission, that is, he has completed his mission of preaching the gospel everywhere he had been and now he will be free to go to Rome (15:22). One should never take a phrase or word out of its context because you twist the meaning to mean things never intended by the Spirit.

- Up to this point Paul had preached the gospel everywhere he went from Jerusalem to Illyricum (modern day Bosnia and Croatia). His careful strategy of “fully” preaching in every province and city was his first priority. This probably is a reference to his journeys through Macedonia, a vast rugged territory where he traveled on foot. Most see this occurring during Acts 20:1-3 (Also 2 Cor 13:1-2, 10). Paul had been waiting on a response to his second epistle to the Corinthians before proceeding to Corinth, from which he would write this epistle to the Romans. Paul’s commitment should become our model for ministry today. What can you glean out of these verses from Paul’s motivation and passion for us today?

Acts 16:10 (what initiated Paul’s mission to Macedonia and Illyricum)

Rom 1:15

Rom 10:16

Rom 15:20

1 Cor 9:16

1 Cor 10:16

Eph 3:8

15:20-21 The apostolic passion is to be the first among a people group or a town with the gospel message. This is the vision of pioneer evangelists, opening up new territories to church planting so that not only can everyone hear the good news, but that a community of believers, i.e. churches, would be established to continue to propagate the message throughout the new region. Paul was not free to depart to a new region until the first task was finished. A number of principles are implied in these verses:

- Evangelists should be targeting totally unreached regions or people groups, until every people in the world has an established indigenous gospel ministry able to continue to evangelize their people.
- The work of evangelism is not just telling the story, but establishing the story, no matter how long it takes. The task is not done until it can carry on by itself.
- Great care must be taken in how to lay a foundation (1 Cor 3:10) for a new church or people group ministry. Undoing what a mistaken pioneer may have erroneously propagated takes much more effort than founding a ministry on biblical grounds. For example, it is very easy to emphasize a transformed life in a genuine salvation encounter to the extent that ceasing to use drugs or alcohol, wear more cloths, stopping traditional dances or any number of non-Christian activities, all become necessary to be saved. Thus it is easy to deduce that by doing these things a person is saved. This false conclusion is amazingly common. This is why Paul wanted to start the early churches correctly.
- Paul, I believe, personally enjoyed being the first to proclaim the gospel to people for many reasons, not the least of which was to see the fulfillment of the OT passage from Isa 52:15 proved to be true time and again. Discuss how any of these principles should affect your present or future ministry.

C. Paul’s chronological strategy to work out his philosophy of ministry (15:23-31)

^{NET} **Rom 15: 22** This is the reason I was **often hindered** from coming to you.

²³ But now there is nothing more to keep me in these regions, and I have for many years **desired** to come to you

²⁴ when I go to **Spain**. For I **hope to visit** you when I pass through and that **you will help me** on my journey there, after I have **enjoyed your company** for a while.

²⁵ But **now** I go to Jerusalem to **minister to the saints**.

²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia are pleased to make some **contribution for the poor** among the saints in Jerusalem.

²⁷ For they were **pleased to do this**, and indeed they are **indebted to the Jerusalem saints**. For if the Gentiles have shared in their **spiritual things**, they are **obligated** also to **minister to them in material things**.

²⁸ Therefore after I have **completed** this and have safely delivered this bounty to them, I will set out for Spain by way of you,

²⁹ and I know that when I come to you I will come in the **fullness of Christ's blessing**.

³⁰ Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to **join fervently with me in prayer** to God on my behalf.

³¹ Pray that I may be **rescued** from those who are **disobedient** in Judea and that my ministry in Jerusalem may be **acceptable to the saints**,

15:22-23 Paul was systematic, prioritized and strategic in his planning. He was not impulsive nor emotional in his decisions. Paul was “**often hindered**” (imperfect tense meaning that “many times I was hindered”) from coming. In 1 Thess 2:18 Paul stated that it was Satan who hindered him from getting back to Thessalonica, so he sent his team to return to Thessalonica, leaving him alone in Athens (1 Thess 3:1) to complete the establishing of their church. If Satan impeded Paul’s priorities, he persisted until victory was gained. How are “hinderings” and Satan related in Gal 5:4-10?

- The next portion begins a lengthy section that deals with how Paul formed his strategy and plans for his future ministry. He begins by stating he has “**desired**” for years to go to Rome to see the believers there. Paul’s desire took secondary importance to his priority of establishing the churches. Notice that there are no mystical elements, nor voices from heaven, giving directives. Notice secondly: Going to Rome was not his priority either since some unknown person had been the first to lay the foundation of that church, which is what he attempted to always do (15:20). Desires are the beginnings of strategies and plans when subjected to the unselfish guidelines of benefiting others strategically. What principles can you derive from these verses about our desires?

Gal 4:20

1 Tim 3:1

James 4:2-3

15:23-29 Paul is writing from Corinth to the Roman believers. See if you can see Paul’s strategy, priorities and plans over the next few verses. Answer the questions below:

- 1) What action had taken place before his present plans to travel? (15:26)
- 2) From Corinth where did Paul intend to go first? (15:25)
- 3) From Jerusalem where did Paul intend to travel? (15:24, 29)
- 4) From Rome where did Paul intend to travel? (15:24)

NOTES

- From what you understand of Paul's priorities, why is it evident that Paul did not intend to stay a long time in Rome?
- Seldom do the desires or plans that we dream about ever come to pass in the way that we imagined. This is not to discourage planning and developing strategies to accomplish our purposes, especially if they are for His glory; however, as in Paul's case, God had many intermediate objectives before his plans were realized: Paul would be imprisoned about 3 years in Caesarea (Acts 25:8 for one indication of time), then sent to Rome as a prisoner under house arrest in Rome (for another 3 years). He accomplished his missions, but not in the way he originally thought. What can be learned about God's providential dealings with our plans in these verses?
Prov 16:9
Paul's first trial in Rome is summarized: 2 Tim 4:16-18
- In **15:24** what two reasons are mentioned for Paul's visit to Rome?
- What was Paul's mission in Jerusalem? (Rom 15:25-26)
- **15:25 Paul's was to "minister"** (KJV, NET, NKJ) or **"serve"** (NAS, NIV) (*diakoneo*, "wait upon, supply the necessities of life") gives sufficient priority to a "holistic" type of ministry, especially to the desperately needy saints. Much of the principles of giving were written to the Corinthian church (2 Cor 8-10) to instruct them on these principles of giving for this offering. Sensitivity to the needs of the Body of Christ is an evidence of oneness and unity in Christ. How do we "give to Christ" in Matt 25:45?
- **15:26 The first motivation for this one-time response offering** was that it **"pleased"** them (*eudokeo*, aorist tense, "seemed good, think it good, do willingly"). They early were eager to make this offering, but waived for a while when their desire faded. How did Paul respond to their diminished generosity in 2 Cor 8:10-12?
- **15:27 Paul now establishes a general principle for giving to spiritual benefactors.** In this case, the benefactors are the needy Jewish Christians, who in a general sense, were the ones who brought the gospel to the Gentiles (Rom 11:11-12; 17-18; 15:12; Gal 3:14). How is this principle applied in other areas of the church life today?
Gal 6:6
1 Tim 5:17-18
- **15:28 No matter what the risk, Paul was a man of principle:** he started something for God, he finished it, by His grace. Only then would he be free to do whatever else he desired, that is, to visit the believers in Rome. He was just going to pass through Rome, but would end up spending 3 years there as God's plan for his life unfolded. God could trust Paul to finish whatever task he was given, whatever he initiated. How do these verses relate this principle?
Luke 14:28-30

Acts 20:24

2 Cor 8:11

- **15:29 Paul's confidence in the ministry** was not his ability or skills, but the assurance that the "fullness of Christ's blessing" accompanied him. Who has this fullness in John 1:16 and Eph 1:23? Paul began this epistle with this goal. In Romans 1:11-13 can you find three or four goals Paul wanted to complete among the Roman believers?

15:30-32 Now at the end of his epistle Paul expresses his personal need and a request for prayer for safety and accomplishment of his up-coming mission. Specifically what are the believers to pray for in this text and the ones below?

Eph 6:19-20

Col 4:3-4

2 Thess 3:1-2

- **15:30 Expresses three aspects of the prayers Paul is requesting:**
 - (1) it is "through or by" our Lord Jesus Christ" – means that Christ will be instrumental in helping you pray;
 - (2) "for" or "by" the "love of the Spirit" – a reference probably to the love that God has, which the Spirit has poured out in our hearts motivating us to care for one another;
 - (3) "strive together" (*sunagonizomai*, "an intense prayer likened to a struggle") is more than a casual mention, but a fervent, desperately desired mutual request, that is the petitioner desires it as much as Paul. How is Epaphras an example of this kind of prayer in Col 4:12?
- **15:31-32 Paul makes four requests:**
 - (1) That he would be "rescued" or "delivered" from the "disobedient" in Judea (He had experience with such in Acts 14:2; 17:5; and 19:9). Paul knew the risk he was entering, but felt that the potential benefit was worth whatever it might cost him;
 - (2) That his "service" (*diakonia*) would be "acceptable" (*euprosdektos*, "pleasant, welcome"), an offering from Gentile believers (hard for them to accept), thus he was seeking to bond the Jews and Gentile believers together. Perhaps Paul was hoping that they would respond as he did to the offering from the Philippian believers (Phil 4:18);
 - (3) That he may come to Rome "by the will of God" (this phrase is used 23 times in the NT, mostly a reference to obeying the revealed commands) – Paul does not know the future will of God, but asks that it be God's will for him to come to Rome. The phrase "in joy" is in the emphatic position ("in joy I would come...")
 - (4) That they may "mutually be refreshed" (*sunanapauomai*, "lie down with, sleep with" as husband and wife; metaphorically, "refreshed in the company with someone;" "to give and get refreshment by mutual contact," THAYER). The bonding of believers is not sensual, but deeply felt when holy motives drive it.

NOTES

15:33 Paul concludes this section with a brief benediction – the third benediction in this chapter (vv. 5, 13). The God who is the source and provider of peace is an assurance title that whatever these believers may go through outwardly, inwardly the God of peace fills them and is always with them. What rest and confidence can you find in these passages where this title is used?

Rom 16:20

Phil 4:9

1 Thess 5:23

Heb 13:20