

Paul Continues with His Closing Remarks

Romans 15:22-32

Romans 15:22-32 - *"For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, ²⁴ whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.^[a] For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. ²⁵ But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶ For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷ It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. ²⁸ Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. ²⁹ But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. ³⁰ Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, ³¹ that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you."*

Background Notes

Paul had an intense desire to get to Rome. In verse 23 he said, *"...having a great desire these many years to come to you..."* This is not the first time in this letter that Paul had expressed his desire to visit the Christians in Rome. You may recall that we saw this desire back in chapter 1. Paul had never been to Rome -- and his interest in going to Rome was not to do some sightseeing! No, Paul's desire was to meet the Christians at Rome, to fellowship with them, to share the Word with them, and to see them grow in the Lord.

Another reason Paul wanted to get to Rome was so that the Christians there could help him on his way to Spain. Verse 24: *"whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you..."* What did Paul mean when he said that he hoped to be "helped" by the Roman Christians on his way to Spain? Did he just mean encouragement, or possibly an escort? Or did Paul mean financial assistance? We can't be sure! If Paul was speaking of financial assistance, then here we have a New Testament example of raising funds for one's own ministry. (And if so, this is the **only** example of fund-raising for one's own ministry in the New Testament, by the way!) But we can't be sure that's what Paul had in mind.

Whether Paul got to Spain or not, we don't know for sure. There's one extra-biblical source that suggests that he did get to Spain. In the letter of a well-known early Church Father, the "Letter of Clement to the Corinthians," it is stated that Paul "went to the end of the west." This may be an indication that Paul did get to Spain.

In verses 25-28 Paul informed the Christians at Rome that before he would come to them, he was going to go to Jerusalem to take a financial contribution to the needy saints there. “Macedonia and Achaia” mentioned here was the location of churches such as Philippi and Corinth. We read about this collection for the needy believers in Jerusalem in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

“It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things” (v27). That is, the Gentiles were indebted to the Jews for their salvation. After all, Jesus Christ came “to the Jew first,” and the gospel began to spread from Jerusalem. The Gentile churches had the opportunity to help repay this debt by meeting some of the physical needs of these needy Jerusalem believers.

Since Paul was a spiritual Christian, we can look at his plans and see some characteristics of Spirit-led plans.

Doctrinal Points

1. Three characteristics of Spirit-led plans are:

a. Spirit-led plans are logical.

Notice how logical Paul was in his planning. He wanted to visit Rome to build up the saints there, and then he wanted to go on to Spain to further the gospel. In verse 23 Paul said, *“But now no longer having a place in these parts...”* In other words, Paul was saying that the gospel had already been preached in the area where he was located at the time he wrote to the Romans. The seed had been sown, churches had been planted, and now, logically, Paul wanted to move on and go to preach the gospel and visit the believers in Rome. But before Paul could go to Rome, he planned to go to Jerusalem to bring the collection that had been taken in Greece for the needy saints in Jerusalem.

Again, notice how logical these plans were. Why is it that some Christians “kiss their brains goodbye” when it comes to making decisions and making plans? How many times does the Holy Spirit get blamed for our mistakes?

I know of a Christian couple that moved away from an important and vital Christian service that they were involved in. When asked why they moved, they said that they thought and felt that “the Lord wanted them to move” – even though there was no logic to their move at all.

Normally the Lord doesn’t operate this way. Normally, a characteristic of Spirit-led plans is that they’re logical. Now just a little postscript on that couple: soon after their move, they became very unhappy with their new location and they moved again. Then they were unhappy with that location, and they moved a third time. Was this possibly an indication that their first illogical move was not a Spirit-led plan? Remember – normally, Spirit led plans are logical!

b. Spirit-led plans may be hindered.

“For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.” Paul’s plans to come to Rome were hindered because of the need to spread the gospel to other Gentiles who had not heard the gospel yet. That was a priority -- but that didn’t mean that Paul’s initial plans to come to Rome were wrong or selfish.

The same is true in our lives. If our plans are hindered, that doesn’t mean that we’re “unspiritual” or don’t know the Lord’s mind or will in the situation. Many times we initially just don’t see the big picture.

However, sometimes our plans may be hindered because we are unspiritual, and the plans that we make are selfish. We can be glad that the Lord hinders those plans, right?!

Sometimes our plans are godly plans, as Paul’s were, but still they are hindered. Even Spirit-led plans may be hindered. In Acts 16:6-7, in reference to Paul’s second missionary journey, we read, *“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.”* After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit didn’t permit them. Why were they hindered from their godly plans to preach the gospel? Answer: Because God had in mind to get the gospel to Europe. So Spirit-led plans may be hindered or changed by the Lord himself. I

In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul wrote, *“Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.”* Satan hinders sometimes Spirit-led plans. When that is the case, we can be sure of two things:

1. Satan cannot defeat us! We are assured victory over Satan in spiritual warfare. Read Ephesians 6 in this connection.
2. God overrules Satan – Romans 8:28, “All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” Satan may hinder us, but God overrules so that **everything** in our lives **works together** for our good.

c. Spirit-led plans can be revised.

God revised Paul’s spirit-led plans. Paul wanted to get to Rome, and Paul did get to Rome, but not as he planned. He came as a prisoner! This was something that was totally hidden from Paul as he planned and prayed. In verse 29 he said, *“But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”* Well, Paul did come as a blessing to Rome, but not as he originally had planned.

Why did God revise Paul’s godly plans? Many reasons! Let’s just mention one. Paul wrote four books of Scripture because he came to Rome as a prisoner. Read Philippians 1 for some other reasons why God revised Paul’s plans.

God may revise your Spirit-led plans. This is not necessarily an indication that you're "unspiritual" or "off-track" or didn't have the mind of Christ when you made some of these decisions. Here's an illustration: One of the camps where I was to speak this summer unexpectedly canceled all the speakers for all their summer camps. However, soon after that cancelation, the Lord opened the door for me to teach a course in biblical interpretation in Korea during the summer! Spirit-led plans can be revised!

2. Two characteristics of Spirit-led prayers are:

a. Spirit-led prayers are earnest.

In verses 30-32 we have Paul's prayer requests. Because Paul was a spiritual Christian, we can learn something about Spirit-led prayers. Let's review these verses: *"Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, ³¹ that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you"*

Spirit-led prayers are **earnest**! The word used here for "strive" in verse 30 is a word that was used for competition in the arena! Think of two Olympic wrestlers striving to win. Do we strive in our prayers? Are we earnest? Praying for one another is not just a game, it's spiritual warfare! Spirit-led prayers are earnest.

b. Spirit-led prayers are unselfish.

So many of our prayers are self-centered. Notice that Paul's prayer were totally **unselfish**. The only prayer that he requested for himself was that he be protected from the violent unbelievers of Judea. Why? Was it because he was afraid for his own safety? No – he made this request for safety so that his ministry could continue!

Paul prayed that the needy saints in Jerusalem would accept the financial gift from the Gentile believers. He prayed that he might join the Christians at Rome for mutual refreshment and ministry.

Are our prayers unselfish? Spirit-led prayers are unselfish.

Practical Application

Let's be flexible when it comes to making plans

I'm one of those people who tend to get uptight when things don't go exactly as I planned, but we've seen here that godly plans may be hindered and may be revised.

So don't get upset or jump to the wrong conclusion when your godly plans get disrupted! God may revise your plans! Let's be flexible when it comes to making plans.