

Paul's Plans



Ice-Breaker

1. Who was your favorite teacher in high school and why?
2. If you could hop on a plane tomorrow and go visit someone, who would you choose?
3. Share about a missionary you know. Where are they? What is their ministry?



Scripture Passage

Romans 15:14-33

¹⁴I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with 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.

¹⁷Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸I 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--
¹⁹by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰It 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. ²¹Rather, as it is written:

"Those who were not told about him will see,
and those who have not heard will understand."^a

²²This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

²³But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, ²⁴I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷They 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. ²⁸So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. ²⁹I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

³⁰I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. ³¹Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, ³²so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. ³³The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

a [21] Isaiah 52:15



Bible Study

1. Who has been a "Paul" to you, helping you to understand the Christian faith?

2. As this study of Romans nears the end, what particular point has stuck with you?
3. From this passage, what is something you admire or appreciate about Paul and his ministry?
4. What is Paul's reason for ministry? What audience does he seek?
5. Looking over your schedule and priorities this past month, what would you say is your ambition in life? Is that what you want it to be?
6. Paul's ambition was to preach to those who had never heard about Christ (v. 20). To what ministry do you feel God may be calling you?
7. This past week, how did you feel about your life being "an offering acceptable to God" (v. 16)? What can you do in the coming week to be an even better offering?

CASE STUDY: Melissa asks, "Why do you have to bother praying since God already knows what's going to happen anyway?" What is your answer?

Reference Notes

15:14-33 Paul brings his letter to a close (prior to his postscript in chapter 16 in which he greets various friends) by discussing: (1) his apostleship and his authority to write as he does (vv. 14-22), and (2) his travel plans; to go first to Jerusalem (to deliver a collection for the poor) and then to Spain, stopping en route in Rome (vv. 23-33).

15:14 These are not words of flattery designed to win over a hostile audience. One sentence would hardly suffice in light of the preceding chapters. Rather, he seems to feel that to write such specific instructions for behavior (as he has done in 12:1-15:13) to a church he has never visited might seem overly bold (v. 15), even presumptuous. So he hastens to assure them that indeed he does consider them to be mature Christians. **full of goodness.** They love one another, frankly and sincerely. **complete in knowledge.** They understand God's truth; what the Gospel is and what it requires. **competent to instruct.** Of sound moral and intellectual character, they can work out their own problems; i.e., correcting the wrong in one another and encouraging each other to righteous living.

15:15 boldly. Paul's words might appear bold, in that he had neither founded nor visited the church in Rome. He may fear, especially, offending either of the two groups (the weak and the strong) referred to in 14:1-15:13. **on some points.** Probably 12:1-15:13, in which he addresses specific issues of Christian behavior. **remind you.** His first reason for writing is simply to remind them of the truth they already know.

15:16 a minister. In Greek, the word is *leitourgos*, the word from which "liturgy" is derived. In its original use, it designated patriotic tasks voluntarily undertaken on behalf of Greece, such as financing a choir, training an athletic team, or paying the expenses of a naval warship; i.e., "generous service." By God's grace (v. 15), Paul is such a minister, and his responsibilities include writing as he has done to the Romans. **priestly duty.** Paul speaks of his role as a minister in priestly terms: The Gentiles are the offering he presents to God. They have been made pure (sanctified) by the Holy Spirit. His is a holy service, similar to that of the Jewish priests.

15:18-19 Paul has been made a minister to the Gentiles. He has faithfully fulfilled this calling and has seen fruit from his ministry. But all he will talk about is what Christ did through him. Hence his

reference to "the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit" which brought about belief in Christ on the part of the Gentiles.

15:19 signs and miracles. See Acts 2:22,43; 4:30; 5:12; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4.

Illyricum. A Roman province on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, situated roughly where Yugoslavia now is. Paul has preached throughout the northeastern Mediterranean, establishing churches in the major cities. Although no specific mention is made elsewhere of ministry here, it could well have come in A.D. 55 or 56 (see 2 Corinthians 2:12-13), when Paul was in Macedonia (which shared a border with Illyricum).

15:20 Paul's call is to be a pioneer missionary.

15:22 The demands of such pioneer missionary activity have thus far prevented a visit to Rome.

15:23 Paul is not saying that there is no further work to be done there, but simply that his presence is no longer required, since the pioneer work has been completed.

15:24 Spain. The Roman colony of Spain was situated at the edge of the civilized world; no doubt the reason that Paul's pioneering spirit was drawn there. Still, it was no cultural backwater. The poet Lucian came from there, as did Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, and the emperors Trajan, Hadrian, and Theodosius I. Although Paul was arrested and imprisoned prior to realizing the plans he outlines here and there is no New Testament record that he ever went to Spain, he just might have achieved his goal. An ancient document written in Rome (c. A.D. 95) states that, prior to his martyrdom, Paul "came to the extreme limit of the West," which is almost surely Spain. **visit.** Among other reasons, Paul has written this letter as a means of introduction to the church in Rome, which he hopes will support his missionary activity in Spain. Though he does not specify what assistance he hopes for, it probably included material aid as well as prayer and fellowship, and perhaps even a companion from the church who was knowledgeable about Spain.

15:25-27 The collection for the poor in Jerusalem is on the order of a debt for Paul. When he was commissioned by the church to be the apostle to the Gentiles, the only request they had was that he remember the poor (Galatians 2:10). This was no new concern. Once before, he and Barnabas had brought a gift to Jerusalem from the Christians in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:29-30; 12:25). Such a gift could aid the unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians, as well as model the appropriate response to human need.

15:26 Macedonia and Achaia. Two Roman provinces located south of Illyricum, on a peninsula bordering the Adriatic and Aegean Seas (in the region of modern Greece). These were not the only territories that contributed (Acts 20:4 and 1 Corinthians 16:1). They are probably mentioned because at the time that Paul wrote Romans he was living in this region. **for the poor ... in Jerusalem.** As Barclay points out, "Much of the available employment in Jerusalem was connected with the Temple and surely there was job discrimination against those who had become Christians since the Temple and its officials stood as the enemies of Christ." Whether it was because of such prejudice or because of generally hard economic times in Judea that the Christians there were especially in need is unknown.

15:27 pleased. Their gift was voluntary; the obligation was a moral debt, not a legal levy by the mother church. The fact that Gentiles have been ingrafted into the blessings which originally belonged to Israel was Paul's point in Romans 11:11-14.

15:31 Paul has experienced hostility from unbelieving Jews as well as suspicion from converted Jews, the latter over his ministry to the Gentiles.

Caring Time

1. How can you encourage one another in prayer this week?