

Romans 15:14-33

Introduction

After finishing his instruction concerning the relationship Gentile Christ-followers should pursue with unbelieving Israel, Paul gave insight into his future plans and the role he hoped the Christian community in Rome would play in those plans. Paul talked about his apostolic work among Gentiles, about his plans to come to Rome on his way to Spain, about his current trip to Jerusalem to deliver contributions he had collected to help the poor, and petitioned them to pray on his behalf as he dealt with both unbelieving Jews and Christians so that his plans to come to Rome could be realized.

Work Among Gentiles: 15:14-21

Paul began his conclusion with the same positive language with which he opened the letter. The first of his remarks are fitting with compliments common in his day in that part of the world. The first couple of phrases, “full of goodness” and “filled with all knowledge,” appear to be more vague than what follows. “Able to instruct one another” is very likely a more pointed statement. Paul was exhorting them to engage with each other to insure that his previous instruction was carried out. He wanted to make sure they did not behave in such a way that would shut the door to his being able to speak with the synagogue rulers. As will be seen later, he was probably also making sure things remained positive among the believers so that they all would join in helping him make his way to Spain.

Paul’s mission to the Gentiles was an act of God’s grace. He saw his mission as a priestly act of offering up the Gentiles as a sacrifice to God. That his work among Gentiles was sanctioned by and accepted by God could be seen in the working of God’s Spirit in Paul’s ministry. The only reason Paul could boast in his ministry was due to the fact of it being given to him by the grace of God and by the fact that he was proclaiming God’s gift of Jesus Messiah that had been promised to Abraham to both Jew and Gentile. Paul was quick to acknowledge it was Christ’s work accomplished through him, not anything done by his own power or initiative.

As a result of God’s work through the Spirit, Paul had been able to take the gospel from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum. The mention of Jerusalem is important because Paul had received support from the leaders in Jerusalem for his work among the Gentiles (Acts 15; Gal. 2:6-10). This was the place from which the gospel was to be proclaimed first before being taken to the rest of the world. The phrase in verse 19 could read “from Jerusalem in a circle all the way around to Illyricum” *on the Eastern boarder of the Adriatic Sea*. This was intended to show the scope of Paul’s mission as he continued to take the gospel to places it had not previously been taken. Paul saw his calling in scripture (Isa. 52:15). This text comes from the beginning of the fourth Servant passage of Isaiah that speaks of the Servant’s activity among the nations. This section of Isaiah has been referred to previously in Romans to show God’s fulfillment of the promises. Paul saw his work as a part of God’s salvation-history.

Paul's Itinerary: 15:22-29

The underlying reason for Paul's letter is revealed in these verses. He had not been able to come to Rome because of the magnitude of the scope of his mission as describe above. Now that he was wrapping up that stage of his ministry, he was able to make concrete plans to come to Rome. But Rome would only be a layover on his way to his main goal of preaching the gospel as far as Spain. Not only was the role of Gentiles in God's redemptive intention for hardened Israel a reason for Paul's letter, Paul also wanted his time in Rome to be a positive one with the possibility that the believers in Rome would help him on his trip to Spain just as other Gentile believers had helped with the contribution for Jewish Christ-followers in Jerusalem.

Before going to Rome Paul had to deliver the contribution to Jerusalem that Gentile churches had taken up for the poor in Jerusalem. This event squares with what God has said in Romans. Gentiles were sharing in the spiritual blessings originally given to Abraham's descendents (grafted in branches). It would only be right for them to show their appreciation and obligation to Israel by helping Jewish Christ-followers and even hardened Israel when there was a physical need. As Paul had spoken of his mission to Gentiles in liturgical terms (14:16), he does the same in verse 27 with the contribution of the Gentiles for Jerusalem. Their contribution was an act of service (literally "liturgy") to the God of both Jew and Gentile and was an acknowledgement that Gentiles saw themselves as a part of Israel's family. Jewish acceptance of the gift would communicate the same understanding. Paul equated his mission with the blessings of Christ intended for all peoples.

It is also very likely that Paul hoped this gift would stir jealousy in hardened Israel that would lead them to recognize God's work among the Gentiles and possibly lead them to embrace Jesus Messiah. Once he had delivered the contribution, Paul's intention was to go to Rome. Paul would end up in Rome but not as quickly as he had hoped.

Appeal For Prayer: 15:30-33

Paul appealed to them on the basis of their common commitment to Jesus as Lord and the common experience of God's love through the Spirit. There was no unrealistic expectation on Paul's part that he could always persuade hardened Israel to embrace Jesus. So, Paul was in need of their prayers because of the opposition he anticipated in Jerusalem and this was not just casual prayer Paul petitioned from them. The root word used (translated "earnest" or "struggle" here) is also translated "opposition" (1 Thess. 2:2) and "fight" (2 Tim. 4:7). It is a word used of an athletic competition or a fight that carries the connotation of danger and conflict. Through their prayers, believers in Rome could join Paul in his struggles that came from hardened Israel in Judea.

As was noted in 11:16 comments, the word "holy" or "saint" is not necessarily limited to believers. Hardened Israel is still considered to be holy because the first fruits (Patriarchs) were holy. Therefore, the reference to saints here may include both believers and hardened Israel. Paul, as God had done throughout His work with rebellious Israel, would not give up on hardened Israel. Paul wanted to be physically safe when he went to Jerusalem, not simply to preserve his life but so that his ministry would be acceptable to Jews (both believers and unbelievers). His ministry included

both the contribution as well as all the other aspects of his ministry of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Messiah. Paul's hope was that the Jews would accept the gift from Gentile churches and see that gift as evidence of God's gracious work in their lives. This gift would hopefully not only build relationships between believing Jews and Gentiles but also between believers and hardened Israel. If Paul's experience in Jerusalem were to be successful, it would help create a more joyful and refreshing experience when he arrived in Rome. Paul closed the request for pray on his behalf with a prayer for God's presence with Rome. God is described as a God of peace. This is part of the foundational teaching of Romans. God through Christ has created a peaceful relationship (righteousness) between Himself and His creation and has called His people to pursue that same relationship with each other and with the world.

Conclusion

Paul charged the believers in Rome to monitor each other's response to the instruction in this letter so they might fulfill God's purpose for them in regards to hardened Israel and so they might help create a positive experience when Paul arrived in Rome. Paul saw his God given ministry to Gentiles as a priestly offering to God. What he had accomplished thus far was not of his own doing, but was the result of what Messiah had done through him by the power of the Holy Spirit. All the glory goes to God. Having taken the gospel as far as the Eastern border of the Adriatic Sea, Paul then purposed to take the gospel to Spain. On his way there he planned to stop in Rome hoping Rome would help him on his journey to Spain. Peace in Rome was needed in order for his plans for Spain to be realized.

Before going to Rome Paul still had the contribution many Gentile churches had given for the aide needed in Judea as the result of a drought. His hope was that both believing and unbelieving Jews would be able to see the working of God in this Gentile contribution to Jews. Gentiles were obligated to help relieve the physical needs of Jews because Gentiles were sharing in the spiritual blessings that came through the Jewish Messiah. Knowing he could face conflict in Judea, Paul petitioned Rome to join the struggle by praying on his behalf.

Romans
15:14-33

1. Of the things Paul expresses confidence about Rome, what stands out to you?
2. How did Paul see his ministry?
3. What can we understand from this text about the underlying reason for this letter to Rome?
4. What in this text again helps us understand the relationship God wanted between Jews and Gentiles?
5. Although hopeful that hardened Israel would some day embrace Jesus Messiah, what reality did Paul have to continually deal with?
6. Based upon what we have seen before, how would you define “saints” and what impact did Paul hope the contribution would have beyond meeting physical needs?