

Message #54**Romans 15:22-29**

A few years ago, a poll was taken of many different ministers to learn of the bizarre excuses they had heard from people for not attending church:

- 1) We were out of peanut butter for breakfast.
- 2) My kids like to take a nap at the time of the church service.
- 3) My wife cooked bacon for breakfast and we all smelled like bacon.
- 4) We had a bad experience at church one time so we have taken a 10 year break.
- 5) The church is too close to drive but too far to walk.
- 6) I seem to get hemorrhoids sitting in the seats at church.
- 7) When I went to church someone said, "Nice to see you brother" instead of using my name.
- 8) Sometimes when we go we hear about sin and judgment, we don't need that negativity.
- 9) The greeters always smile and welcome us and sometimes we don't feel like smiling.

Now it is clear from this text of Scripture that some of the Romans were asking Paul, "How come you have not been to our church?"

Paul had just written a major inspired letter to the Romans and he had challenged them doctrinally and practically. He obviously knew many of the people who were then living in Rome because he will name many in chapter 16.

Some of those people were talking and wondering why Paul hadn't been there in person. If they were so important, why hadn't Paul paid them a visit in his travels? So Paul hits this head on and what he says is this:

PAUL EXPLAINS THE REASON HE HAS NOT BEEN TO ROME IS BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN TAKING THE WORD OF GOD AND THE GOSPEL OF GOD TO THE REST OF THE WORLD.

Paul was the Apostle singled out by God to take the Grace Gospel to the world and that is what he had been doing. In this part of his letter, Paul takes the time to set forth eight personal circumstances that he wanted them to understand.

CIRCUMSTANCE #1 – Paul had not been to Rome because he was taking the Gospel of Grace to new regions. **15:22**

Doors for Paul kept opening for him to take the gospel to new areas, which is why he had been prevented from going to Rome. He was led by God to take the word of God to new places and that is what had prevented him from making a trip to Rome.

As we saw last time, Paul kept looking for new areas, where there was no church or Apostolic teaching (15:20). Apparently if there had been someone who had been in the area and taught the truth about Jesus Christ and the theology of the grace of God, he would not have gone.

Everywhere he went was a religious area. But it was an area that lacked truth. Here is the one Apostle who has been entrusted with the grace of God and when he learned of someplace that had never been exposed to it, he took the message to them. We learn from the previous verses that he would take the Gospel to new areas where no one else had gone.

When I read this I just cannot help but think of Lewis Sperry Chafer and the burden he had for a school that would teach the Bible and focus on the Grace of God. Mr. Miles knew Dr. Chafer and would tell me things about him. Dr. Chafer really learned much from C. I. Scofield. Shortly before Dr. Scofield died in 1922, he told Lewis Sperry Chafer to research and write on the Grace of God because it is so important to doctrine. As Dr. Chafer traveled around he would talk with ministers and ask them what they felt they lacked. They said we lack an understanding of the books of the Bible. We did not get knowledge of that in school. So Dr. Chafer knew there needed to be a school that would teach the books of the Bible and the doctrine of Grace. Chafer said everywhere I went I saw the need.

That was Paul. Everywhere he went he saw the need. This is why he hadn't been to Rome.

CIRCUMSTANCE #2 – Paul was now going to Rome because he had taken the Gospel to every place and region God had intended. **15:23**

This text is fascinating for forming a missionary philosophy. Paul took the Gospel to new regions. This word “region” (klima) is one Paul uses three times - Rom. 15:23; II Cor. 11:10; Gal. 1:21. It is not the word for city. This seems to refer to a general area in which there were cities (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 249).

What we may gather from this is that Paul would go to a general area, not necessarily every city, and would depend on God to raise up people and save people and start a church. Then he would move on to another region and do it again.

Now at this point, Paul had apparently covered the specific regions God had wanted him to minister. He was now sensing that he could leave for a while and visit Rome.

CIRCUMSTANCE #3 – Paul was anticipating going to Rome because he had wanted to do this for many years. **15:23**

This is a very significant point to see. The fulfillment of God's ultimate will may take many years. God may lay a longing in your heart to do something, but it may take years before that longing will come to fruition.

He specifically says that he had “a longing” to go to Rome. The word “longing” (epipoqia) is a word that refers to a deep desire or great inner, passionate desire (*Ibid.*, pp. 172-173).

We learn a very important lesson here. Just because one has some intense desire for something does not automatically mean the timing is right to do it. Paul had a longing to go to Rome for years and yet the timing was not right for him to go. What Paul did until God finally opened the door was to faithfully minister where he was. He kept at his work of faithfully communicating grace. That longing was of God and finally it would come true.

CIRCUMSTANCE #4 – Paul was anticipating going to Rome when he would travel a specific route to Spain. **15:24a**

We learn here that Paul was a systematic thinker and planner. If he is going to go to Rome, he must make travel arrangements. He is in Corinth writing this letter and Rome is about 730 miles to the Northwest. Spain was 900 miles from Rome straight west across the Mediterranean Sea. That would be the distance by boat.

So Paul is mapping out his travel itinerary and saying the best plan for me to come to Rome is to plan a trip to Spain and stop in Rome first. I have always had this longing to come to Rome so this will be a great time to do that.

I asked Harold Kregel, who was a missionary in Spain for years, whether or not in the annals of history there was ever any record of Paul going to Spain. Harold told me that about 100-150 miles south of Barcelona there was a record of Paul visiting Spain.

CIRCUMSTANCE #5 – Paul anticipated that the believers in Rome would help him go to Spain. **15:24c**

Paul anticipated that these believers in Rome would help him as he would leave Rome and go to Spain.

Fritz Reinecker, in his *Linguistic Key to the New Testament*, says this infinitive “to be helped” said that would include: 1) Food; 2) Companionship; 3) Travel arrangements; 4) Money (Vol. 2, p. 37). It would also include housing and care while he was there in Rome. Frederic Godet said that these Romans would provide Paul with 1) Companionship; 2) Expenditures.

Now Paul knew many of these people, which is obvious from the list in chapter 16. Many of these people had come to faith under his Apostolic ministry. He had never been to Rome and he had not seen some of these people for over 20 years. But this is one time he informs them that he had an expectation that when he would come to Rome, they would help him.

The Romans had reaped tremendous benefit from the ministry of the Apostle Paul. The Grace Gospel was unraveled for them by Paul. They did have a responsibility to him, as long as he was alive.

His approach is very important. He does not beg for money, he does not ask for money, he does not solicit or try to manipulate to get money; he simply says when I come to Rome, I expect you will help me as I go to Spain, after I have been in your company for a while.

What dollar value could you put on the Apostle who just unlocked the Grace Gospel that would save them forever? Would that be worth 10% or 15% or 20%? What would be the value? Paul does not ask for percentage; he just says when I come, I anticipate you will help me go forward.

CIRCUMSTANCE #6 – Paul anticipated enjoying their company for a while. **15:24d**

Quite honestly, there are some churches and some people who will drain you. They are in sad shape. They don't have any joy. They are never happy and they drag you down. Paul says when I come to Rome, I expect this will be a wonderful experience.

In fact, Paul uses a word for “enjoy” that means to be filled up to a full enjoyment level (*Ibid.*, p. 149). Paul expected to go to Rome and fully enjoy these people and the experience of being with them. **It is one thing to just endure a church; it is another thing to completely enjoy a church.**

Paul says I fully expect to come to Rome and have a wonderful time with you.

CIRCUMSTANCE #7 – Paul informs the Romans of his immediate plans to go to Jerusalem. **15:25-28**

Paul just got done telling them that he is truly anticipating coming to Rome and then says but first, I must go to Jerusalem.

We may recall that Paul is in Corinth, when he writes this letter. That is only 730 miles from Rome, which is much shorter than traveling to Jerusalem. To go to Jerusalem from Corinth, one needs to go in the opposite direction of Rome and travel for 817 miles by ship or 1,770 miles by land route.

Then, once you are in Jerusalem, if you want to travel to Rome, you must backtrack 2,430 miles by land or 1,434 miles by ship. The simplest thing to do if in Corinth would just be go to Rome.

Paul says I can't do that. Before I go to Rome, I must go back to Jerusalem. Paul says there are reasons I am going to Rome.

Reason #1 - He would travel to Jerusalem to serve the saints. **15:25**

The word “serve” is the one from which we get our English word “deacon.” Paul considered his trip to Jerusalem to be a very sacred part of his ministry aimed at those who had believed in Jesus Christ.

He was not going back to Jerusalem to have a ministry to the lost; he was going back to have a ministry to the saints. Don't overlook this. He believed his service ministry was to be focused on the saints, not the lost people. The specific saints were Jewish believers who lived in Jerusalem.

Paul was not going to return to Jerusalem because he felt a ministry burden for lost religious leaders and Pharisees, Scribes and Priests. He is going there focused on believers.

He was taking his Apostolic message and ministry to Jerusalem to help the believers there.

Reason #2 - He would travel to Jerusalem to take an offering. **15:26a**

Paul was carrying a huge sum of money that had been collected from Macedonia and Achaia. Macedonia is the area known today as northern and central Greece. Achaia is the area known as the southern part of Greece and land between the Adriatic and Aegean Sea.

It is a massive amount of land that today includes Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, and Kosovo. Paul had collected a massive offering that believers had given him to take to the believers in Jerusalem.

Notice his statement, these believers in these places had been "pleased" to give the offering. They had not been begged or manipulated to give it. They were pleased to do this.

This is significant. Paul was taking a huge offering collected from these Gentile believers, not to give to just any Jew, but to the believing Jews.

Reason #3 - He would take the offering to Jerusalem because the believers were poor. **15:26b**

The Jewish believers in Jerusalem were very poor for five historical and Biblical facts:

- 1) Overpopulation - many Jews who had believed in Jesus moved to Jerusalem expecting Christ's immediate return - Acts 2:46.
- 2) Zealousness - many Jews who had believed had sold their homes and pooled their resources for the work of the Gospel and their funds were running low - Acts 2:42-47.
- 3) Persecution - Believing Jews in Jerusalem were persecuted and even Paul had previously chased some out of their homes and jobs - Acts 8:1.
- 4) Famine - According to Acts 11:27-30 a major famine had spread through the area just a few years before this letter during the reign of Claudius and there was a real need for food.
- 5) Taxation - The Jews were being heavily taxed by the Romans.

Again, we want to point out, this was not an offering Paul was taking to provide a welfare program for every Jew. This was a specific offering for believers who were Jews.

Reason #4 - He would take the offering to Jerusalem to fulfill the Gentile debt owed to Jews.
15:27

Notice, Paul did not beg these people to take this offering; they were pleased to do it. These Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia were prospering and they knew they owed these Jewish believers a great debt.

All the spiritual blessings they received and for that matter all we have received have come from Israel. Our entire package of salvation is rooted in Jewish people. The Bible was written by Jewish people with Luke being the only exception. God's promises and program was aimed at Israel and we have been grafted into it.

Everything we have in our relationship with God has started with Israel and even our future will be that of sharing it with Israel.

It is a wonderful thing to know that some of our tax money right now is being used to help Jewish people in Israel who have been hurt in war.

If we could actually learn of Jewish believers right now in Israel who are in great need and we could verify it, it would be a joy to help them. We realize the debt we owe to Israel and it would be a joy to pay it. That is the way those Gentiles in Paul's day viewed it.

CIRCUMSTANCE #8 – Paul informs the Romans that once he has completed this project, he will come to them in the full blessings of Christ. **15:28-29**

Paul needed to take this offering to Jerusalem to put his apostolic seal on the project and then he would head for Spain and on the way stop and visit in Rome.

He says he will come with the “fullness of the blessing of Christ.” Why? It is because he fully completed the project. He did everything God wanted him to do and he knew that once he had done that, he would have the full blessings of God.

If you want to go someplace in the full blessings of Christ, finish the project.

The full blessings of Christ never go to quitters or slackers.

What we have today is Paul's letter to the Romans. In this amazing letter we see the grace gospel. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.