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Romans

... making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. Romans 1:10

The previous verse said “without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.” The prayers are what lead to Paul’s request in this verse - that he would be able to make a personal visit to those in Rome. “If by some means” indicates his tremendous desire to be there with them.

To Paul, it didn’t matter how it came about so much as that it would happen. In the book of Acts, it is seen that he did make it to Rome after being accused and imprisoned while in the land of Israel and then being taken on a long, disaster-fraught journey by ship to Italy and then up the peninsula to Rome. He prayed “if by some means” and the petition was eventually granted in a most remarkable and well documented way.

In his request, he also notes that if the trip to Rome is possible, that it be “in the will of God.” Paul could have simply gotten on a ship or taken one of the roads which led to Rome and been there in a short amount of time. But he understood that his was a ministry of obedience to his calling and that what he did needed to be within the will of God and not because of his own desires.

If and until the time selected by God arose, he was determined to continue with the ministry as the Lord directed. This is clearly seen in chapter 15 of Romans where he writes this –

“And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: “To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.” For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.”
Romans 15:20-23

Paul gave the reason he was hindered from going to Rome – “To preach the gospel, not where Christ was named...” However, his ministry and goals to that end were being realized and so he planned on going as far as Spain to proclaim the gospel there. On the way, it was his intent to visit his beloved brethren in Rome.

What should be noted above all in this desire of Paul is that his intent in Rome was to share in Christ, not sightsee. Rome was the center of the world as far as things were concerned. There was royalty, pomp, wealth, and a million things a visitor could do and see. And yet Paul’s desire was one of fellowship, teaching, and building up of the church, not taking in the splendor of the city.

Is this your heart’s desire? How many of us go on short-term missionary journeys in order to see the world or to visit an interesting location? Our intent and goal should be one of service, not self-satisfaction. Let us remember this and pray that our goals are in line with His good news.

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— Romans 1:11

Again we note that it is Paul's desire to see the believers in Rome and not the city itself. He was far less interested in the splendor of the buildings, the pomp of those who govern, or the wealth of the commerce and trade and far more interested in the establishment of the faith of those who were called saints.

Of particular interest and purpose was that he would be there to "impart some spiritual gift" to the church. There are two main views on this statement –

1) The first is that this "spiritual gift" was an extraordinary apostolic gift such as speaking in tongues, healing, future prophecy, etc. Within this view we will note two sub-categories.

a) Once received the miraculous gift would be established and could then be passed on, such as charismatic churches believe is the case today.

b) This gift was given by Paul because he was an apostle and would be to validate his apostolic office and help solidify their faith in the gospel. Beyond Paul, the gift couldn't be transferred because such gifts were given to and through the apostles only.

2) The second main view is that this "spiritual gift" wasn't a miraculous gift at all.

The second option is certainly the correct analysis. To assume that Paul was going to give them a miraculous gift to establish or solidify their saving faith is contrary to the gospel message. It is also a forced, unnatural reading of the intent, which will be explained completely in the second half of the thought (verse 12.)

Paul uses the term *ti metado charisma* "some that I may impart gift" which is certainly a general gift of edification such as instruction. His intent is to give it just as he is doing with his letter, but in person. There is no other instance elsewhere

in Paul's writings where the words he uses in this verse denote the giving of a miraculous gift.

Paul was a builder of faith and an instructor in the gospel. He was given the gifts of an apostle, but he wasn't one to wield them in a showy manner, nor use them as a point of impressing others (1 Corinthians 14:20). Paul's ideas of spiritual gifts for the building up of the body in Rome are listed in chapter 12 and they fit the sound and established criteria of organizational development, not the unwieldy foundation of the sensational.

When we as believers put our trust in, or base our faith on, outward demonstrations of spiritual gifts we have an unsound foundation. The word of God, the Holy Bible, is what tells us of Jesus as spoken through the prophets and apostles. This is where the basis of strong faith should be realized.

...that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Romans 1:12

Here is Paul's complete thought for reference – "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

As noted in the previous verse, the "spiritual gift" he desired to impart was most likely not a miraculous gift. Instead, he desired to impart a gift that they "may be established." This is sure because these were already believers and therefore a miraculous sign wouldn't get them any more "saved." Therefore, the verse isn't speaking of establishment in this sense, but rather grounding in the salvation they already possessed.

In 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul tells us the purpose of miraculous signs – "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but

prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.” Paul is writing to believers in Rome.

To confirm that this wasn't the imparting of such a gift, Paul completes the thought with verse 12 by stating first “that is.” This term is a conjunction tying verse 11 with verse 12. Paul is directly connecting “that you may be established” with “that I may be encouraged together with you.”

As an apostle, Paul didn't need a miraculous sign to be encouraged and it would make no sense to attempt to be encouraged by a sign which he was bestowing. Instead, he is speaking of a spiritual gift of edification for the building up of their faith; a spoken epistle to compliment the written one.

Such a spoken message would accomplish exactly what he desired “by the mutual faith of both you and me.” He is quite clear that they have the faith already, just as he does and he is hoping to add to that faith so that they will be productive, competent followers of Jesus.

In his second letter, Peter describes exactly what believers should do after exercising their initial faith. It is surely this thought, not an outward demonstration of the miraculous, that Paul is speaking of –

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:5-8

Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. Romans 1:13

Here Paul defends that it was his intention to come to Rome earlier and that he hasn't simply ignored the believers there. We've already seen that he is fully aware of the faith of those in Rome (v. 8); that he is constantly in prayer for them (v. 9); that those prayers included a requested way for him to visit Rome (v. 10); and that his intent was to build them up and thus be encouraged together with them in their mutual faith (v. 11).

Because of this sequence of thought, he lets them know that his heart for joining with them is honest and that his plans have included a visit to them all along. However, he has been "hindered until now." This is Paul's way of telling them that he has been following a set course of action which simply wouldn't allow him to venture to Rome. This was explained in our analysis of verse 10 which took us to Romans 15 to understand why.

The next thing Paul tells us is the reason for his desire to visit those in Rome – "that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles." Putting everything together, we see that the reason for him being hindered from joining them was because he desired to "bear fruit" for the sake of the Gospel. However, his greatest desire was to "preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation." (15:20). Therefore, because Christ was already known in Rome, it would be contradictory to his modus operandi to go there.

Now however (as Romans 15 goes on to explain) this will no longer be a hindrance and therefore his ability will be joined to his desire. We can look at Paul's example and learn from it. Often we put our desires above our set goals and those goals then suffer because of it. This lesson is particularly important in matters pertaining to the faith and therefore we need to determine at the outset that we will let nothing hinder the goals we set. By doing so, we show that the ministry and gospel of Jesus is more important than the temporary things our eyes alight upon.