

## **Romans 15:14-33 Answers** **God's Purpose & Plans for Paul**

**Introduction:** Paul was a man on the move. Today's lesson is about Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and Paul's plans to visit Rome.

Romans 15:14 is the beginning of the end of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. It is very personal in nature, revealing Paul as a man of tact, humility, passion and concern for the feelings of others. To follow Paul's example in these virtues can result in a transformational blessing (Hendriksen, p. 484).

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**\*\*\*\*What motivated Paul to travel so widely, from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum (15:14-21)?** Somewhat like the starship Enterprise, Paul's mission was to boldly go where no evangelist had gone before, taking the Gospel specifically to the Gentiles. Scripture indicates Paul made three missionary journeys throughout the Northeastern Mediterranean world traveling to modern Israel, Syria, Cyprus, Turkey, Albania, Greece and Italy.

**Note:** Illyricum (Il-lyric-um) was the Roman province directly East of Italy across the Adriatic Sea and above Greece. Today the area is roughly composed of the countries of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania.

**What basic satisfaction did Paul feel concerning the believers in Rome (15:14)?** Paul was satisfied that they were full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct each other. This satisfaction was in contrast to some other New Testament churches known to be immature:

**ESV 1 Corinthians 3:1-3** But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

**ESV Hebrews 5:12-13.** . . . you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

**Application:** Paul had never met the Roman church. It is good to assume one's fellow Christians are relatively mature until they have given positive evidence to the contrary (Cranfield, p. 752).

**Insight:** Paul may have felt the need to reassure them of his high view of their maturity in light of the bold things he wrote in the letter.

**1. How does our church measure up to the standard set in 15:14? Would Paul be satisfied with us?**

**2. Since Paul was satisfied with the church in Rome (15:14), why did write so boldly to them on some points (15:15)?** He wrote **1)** by way of reminder and **2)** because God gave him grace to minister to Gentiles to make them an acceptable offering to God.

Paul did not start the church in Rome and he had never been to visit them. Yet he presumed to write boldly to them. Paul took some liberties in writing. It can easily be imaged that some might resent him as an outsider meddling in their affairs. However, Paul had a divine calling to work with Gentile churches. He went to new areas to preach the Gospel, he oversaw the new churches by visits and letter and he even wrote to churches he did not start, such as the one in Rome.

**Application:** If we are on a high horse we need to get down off of it. We all need reminding to do the things we already know to do.

**ESV 2 Peter 1:12** Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

**How did Paul describe himself in 15:16?** He described himself as a minister of Christ to the Gentiles in priestly service of the Gospel whose offering was the Gentiles.

**3. What priestly goal did Paul express for the Gentile Christians at the end of 15:16?** His goal was that they be an offering acceptable to God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

**4. In 15:17, Paul said was proud of his work for God. What reason did Paul have to be proud (15:18-19)?** The reason Paul could be proud (15:17) was because he knew it was Christ who accomplished His work through Paul in word, deed, signs and wonders (5:18-19).

**Based on 15:18-19, what made Paul's evangelism so convincing?** Miracle evangelism was one key to Paul's success.

When God moves in an area, He sees to it that **1)** the word of the Gospel is spoken, **2)** the deeds of obedience by God's people are obvious, **3)** signs and wonders take place and **4)** the power of the Holy Spirit moves upon people. Predestination is true, but just look at the process!

**5. Can we still expect to see these things today (15:18-19)? Why?** Some say no, that such things were only associated with the original apostles for the initial establishment of the church. However, the repeated testimony from such places like China or India where the church is growing rapidly is that such things are still for today.

**6. What gospel ambition did Paul express in 15:20-21?** He wanted to preach the gospel where it had never been heard before, in fulfillment of Isaiah 52:15.

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\*\*\*\***When did Paul plan to visit Rome (15:22-29)?** When Paul wrote this he was on his way to take an offering back to Jerusalem. After that he planned to go to Spain, stopping off in Rome on his way there. Paul wanted to enjoy their company for a while (15:24), which ties in back with Paul's earlier expressed desire to visit them (1:8-15).

**The Roman World:** The Greeks under Alexander the Great conquered land all the way into India. Later, the Romans colonized Spain and organized it into three provinces. Roman troops fought in Germany during the time to Augustus. Just a few years prior to Paul writing to the church in Italy, Claudius had conquered the southern parts of Britain (Cranfield, p. 767-768). Had God sent Paul toward India rather than Italy, the center of Christianity for the past 2,000 years might have been India and China rather than Europe.

**7. Why had Paul been hindered so often from going to Rome (15:22)?** *See back to 15:20.* The gospel had already been preached in Rome and Paul's calling was to unevangelized areas.

**8. Paul wanted the Romans to help him on his journey go Spain (15:24). What does that mean?** It means Paul wanted them to give him financial support for his travel expenses; compare Acts 15:3, 20:38, 1Co 16:6, 2Co 1:16, Titus 3:13 (Hendrikson, p. 493).

**ESV 3 John 1:6-8** You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

**ESV 2 Corinthians 1:16** I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea.

**ESV Titus 3:13** Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing.

**Insight:** It is not true that Paul never asked for money nor that he always paid his own way by tent-making.

**9. Why were the saints in Jerusalem in need of aid (15:25-26)?** The reason given in the text is that some of them were poor. Just as some parts of the United States are poorer than others, so too some parts of the Roman Empire were poorer than others. The church in Judea was improvised.

**Who contributed this money for the poor saints in Jerusalem (15:26)?** The churches in Macedonia and Achaia gave the money.

**What modern countries comprise Macedonia and Achaia (15:26)?** Roughly speaking this is today's Northern and Southern Greece.

**10. What important lesson does 15:27 contain regarding our giving?** Material blessings are owed/obligated, in appreciation for spiritual blessings received. It is tempting to be so soured by the greed of the prosperity preachers that we quit giving. However, we must be careful not to over-react and become constipated contributors.

ESV 1 **Corinthians 9:7** Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

ESV 1 **Corinthians 9:11** If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

ESV 1 **Corinthians 9:13-14** Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

**11. How had the Gentiles shared in the spiritual blessings of Jewish believers (15:27)?** See back to 3:1-1-2, 9:4-5, 15:8-9. The idea seems to be that God's promise of salvation for all the families of the earth was fulfilled through the Jewish people (Jesus was, after all, Jewish!). The Gentile Christians were thus debtors to the Jewish people and owed them assistance toward relieving their material poverty.

ESV **John 4:22** . . . salvation is from the Jews.

**According to 15:28-29, where was Paul headed after he went back to Jerusalem?** His goal was to get to Spain, stopping off in Rome along the way.

**12. Did Paul ever make it back to Rome or to Spain (15:28-29)?** See Acts 21-28. When Paul got to Jerusalem with the offering he was arrested by the unbelieving Jews. He did in fact eventually go to Rome, but not in the manner he had expected (he went as a prisoner to stand trial there). It is not known for sure if he ever made it to Spain or not. Some think he was martyred there in Rome as a result of the Jerusalem arrest. Others speculate he was released from his Roman imprisonment and did travel to Spain before being rearrested later and then martyred (or so indicates 1 Clement 5:7, which states Paul made it to the Western extremes of the Roman Empire).

\*\*\*\*\***In what way could the brothers strive together with Paul (15:30-33)?** Paul appealed to them to strive together with him in prayer.

**13. What do you envision when you think of someone striving in prayer (15:30)?** The Greek word here is *sunagonizesthai* (agonize). The idea behind it seems to be that Paul wants them simply to pray for him and with him, not half-heartedly or casually, but with earnestness, urgency and persistence (Cranfield, p. 777).

**14. What reasons did Paul offer in 15:30 for them to strive with him in prayer?** He appealed to them **1)** by the Lord Jesus Christ and **2)** by the love of the Spirit.

**What were Paul's three prayer requests (15:31-32)?** He wanted them to join him in praying **1)** that he would be delivered from unbelievers in Judea, **2)** that his service for the Jerusalem saints would be acceptable and **3)** that he would be able to visit the church in Rome.

**What reason did Paul have to wary of the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem (15:31)?** These same Jews had already murdered Jesus and James and persecuted the church so badly it was scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

**ESV 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16a** . . . you, brothers, became imitators of the churches . . . in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved — so as always to fill up the measure of their sins.

**15. Was the prayer for Paul's deliverance from unbelievers in Jerusalem answered positively (15:31)? Explain.** *See Acts 22-28.* Even though Paul was arrested when he got to Jerusalem, he actually was delivered from the unbelieving Jews. Their plan was to kill him right there and then but the Romans intervened to protect him.

**16. Was his service to the Jerusalem saints found acceptable (15:31)? Explain.** *See Acts 21:17, 24:17.* Paul evidently made it to Jerusalem with the offering and was welcomed by the church.

**ESV Acts 21:17** When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly.

**ESV Acts 24:17** . . . I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings.

**17. When Paul finally went to Rome was it with joy (15:32)?** *See Acts 28:14b-15.*

**ESV Acts 28:14-15** . . . And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.

**With what prayer wish did Paul end this section (15:33)?** This prayer/wish encompasses the sum of all true blessings, including final salvation (Cranfield, p. 780).

**Dieseling:** The last sentence in chapter 15 would have been a good ending for the letter, but then Paul wrote a little more, penning yet another potential good ending half-way through chapter 16 (16:16). But then we wrote still more, sort of a p.s., finally signing off in 16:25-27. This last part of Romans is a long good bye!

## So What?

**18. Why should you not be insulted when a minister boldly reminds you of things you already know (15:14-16)?**

**19. What does God sometimes do to help bring people to faith (15:17-19a)?**

**20. Why did Paul want to go to Rome and what application does that have for us (15:22-29)?**

He wanted to go there to preach the Gospel (1:15), to strengthen & encourage the church (1:11-12), to enjoy their company and to be helped by them on his way to Spain (15:24). Learning from this, we should seek ways to strengthen and encourage other believers and we should support those who preach the gospel and plant churches (missionaries).

**21. Would you describe your prayer life as a time of striving (15:30)?**

**22. What can we learn about answered prayer from 15:30-32?** Our prayers are not always fulfilled in ways we were expecting/asking for.

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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