

Subject: *Paul's Plans and God's Providence*

Scripture: *Romans 15:22-33*

These verses tell us about Paul's personal thoughts and plans to visit the church at Rome, a church where he had not been before. As Paul reviews his plans, he is aware of God's providence. Everything in Paul's ministry was possible only by God's grace and blessing. Nothing happened by chance or accident. Everything was directed by God's providence. The same is true for us and our service. We can make plans, but we submit those plans to God and rest in His sovereign will and purpose.

1. PAUL'S FUTURE PLANS (vs. 22-28)

As we read these verses we see a man of planning and a man of action. Paul planned his work and then he worked his plan.

A. He was now free to leave his assignment (vs. 22-23)

He had been "much hindered" from leaving because there were new places to preach the Gospel (see vs. 20-21). He did a thorough job where he was and finished the task, and only then was he ready to leave. We speak of being "providentially hindered," which means that God hindered us or kept us from doing something or going somewhere. Paul had a "great desire" for "many years" to visit the church at Rome.

B. He was going to visit Rome on his way to Spain (vs. 24)

Spain (ref. to as Tarshish in OT) was considered the westernmost point of the ancient world. Paul wanted to enjoy their company for a while. From the time that Paul was converted on the Damascus Road, he wanted to stay close to other believers and enjoy fellowship with people in the churches. It's a sad situation today when so many who call themselves Christians find so many other things more attractive than fellowship with other believers.

C. He was first going to Jerusalem to deliver an offering (vs. 25-28)

Paul's ultimate plan was to go to Spain, but his immediate plan was to visit Jerusalem with a gift from the Gentile believers. This is the offering Paul spoke of in 1 Cor. 16 and 2 Cor. 8-9.

Paul's plans were always subject to God's will.

Proverbs 16:9 *A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.*

Paul sensed it was God's timing and will for him to go to Jerusalem and then on to Rome and Spain. God had put this in Paul's heart for some time.

Romans 1:10-13 ¹⁰ *Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.* ¹¹ *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;* ¹² *That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.* ¹³ *Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.*

God creates the desires of our heart and then He fulfills those desires.

Psalms 37:4 *Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.* The word “desires” (Heb. *mishalah*) is the word for petitions or requests. Paul had prayed about this and now God is granting his desire.

2. GOD’S FAITHFUL PROVIDENCE (vs. 29-33)

A. He is confident of God’s full blessing (vs. 29)

He had every reason to believe that his visit to Rome would be blessed by God. When we are doing God’s will we should expect Him to bless. Jesus taught us to pray: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” The Bible tells us the right way and the wrong way to make our plans.

Here’s the right way: **1 John 5:14-15** ¹⁴ *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: ¹⁵ And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

Here’s the wrong way: **James 4:13-15** ¹³ *Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: ¹⁴ Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. ¹⁵ For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*

B. He asks for their prayers (vs. 29-32) – He asks the believers at Rome to...

- Pray for Christ’s sake (on the basis of their unity in Christ and for His glory)
- Pray for the love of the Spirit (on the basis of their love that came from the H. S.)
- Pray with intensity (a spiritual struggle, agony) – **Colossians 4:12** *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*
- Pray for deliverance from unbelievers (who were strongly opposed the gospel as he had been). This prayer was answered and Paul’s life was spared and he eventually went to Rome. But he went not just as a preacher, but as a prisoner.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 ¹ *Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: ² And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.*

- Pray for believers to accept the gift (the Jewish believers might be prejudiced against the Gentile believers, and they may have resented the idea of receiving charity). It often takes more grace to be on the receiving end than on the giving end.
- Pray for God’s will to allow the visit
- Pray for the visit to be refreshing (after a long time of tiresome ministry)

C. He prays for them (vs. 33)

In chapter 15 the Lord is called “the God of patience and consolation” (vs. 5), “the God of hope” (vs. 13), and now “the God of peace.” He is the source of everything we need. One of our greatest needs is peace. We need peace with God and we need the peace of God, and He gives us both when we are His children. But the Bible says there is no peace for the wicked.

We can learn a lot from Paul’s example. He had a plan and he trusted God’s providence.

- He finished the assignment he had to do and then was free to leave
- He had a worldwide vision for the gospel ministry
- He took care of immediate needs as he made worldwide plans
- He expected God’s blessing in doing His will
- He asked for the prayers of other believers
- He prayed for others

Paul’s life was based on doing God’s will and trusting God’s providence. That’s the way all God’s people ought to live.