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Romans

For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. Romans 15:26

As the book of Romans supports the book of Acts (and vice versa), what Paul writes here also supports his other writings in many ways. In this verse, he notes "a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem." This in turn supports verses such as 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 (which then refers to something he said in Galatians 2:10).

And the gift, when being prepared, is later noted in the following two passages from 2 Corinthians -

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

"Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; 2 for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the

Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority." 2 Corinthians 9:1, 2

Time and again, these letters and the other books of the New Testament refer to, and rely on, one another. There is ample evidence that they are a harmoniously tied-together body of work which is consistent and reliable. We need not worry about those false scholars to attempt to interject doubt into the reliability and authority of Scripture.

Having noted that, the verse being analyzed begins with "For." It is based on what he had just said to the Romans in the previous verse - "But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints." His reason for going to minister there is explained now. And that reason is that "it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make" their contribution. This was a voluntary and even joyous offering for the needy saints in Jerusalem. The Macedonians are referred to in the verses from 1 and 2 Corinthians noted above. "Achaia" is the area where Corinth was the capital.

These willing people had prepared an offering which Paul would personally oversee in order to ensure that it arrived in Jerusalem for its intended recipients. Paul took great care in ensuring that everything concerning the money was handled openly and honestly during this process.

Life application: Again today, as is the case throughout Scripture, the Bible confirms itself internally and it ensures us that it is a unified whole given to us from the wisdom of God and breathed out by His Holy Spirit through chosen prophets and apostles.

It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Romans 15:27

Referring to the donation from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, Paul says that "it pleased them indeed" to give this offering. And then he explains that in fact "they are debtors" in this regard. The offering is something that, although not compulsory was still an obligation. In his explanation, he states that "if the Gentiles have been partakers of spiritual things" then they have a responsibility to the one(s) who imparted them. This responsibility and "duty is also to minister to them in material things."

There was a great need in Jerusalem where the Jewish saints resided. Paul felt that resolving that need was something incumbent on the Gentiles who had received their spiritual heritage from those Jews who had brought the message to them. This sentiment is seen in Galatians 2:7-10 -

"But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do."

"The poor" in this passage from Galatians included those in Jerusalem from whom the spiritual heritage first came. Paul notes that they are "debtors" to them, but it isn't Paul's way of subordinating them in a heavy-handed manner. Rather it is acknowledging what is right and proper. We can tell this for certain because he spoke of himself in exactly this way in Romans 1:14 - "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise."

Paul felt himself a debtor and he worked tirelessly to pay the debt he felt he owed. So for him to call those Gentiles who had received their spiritual heritage from the Jews in Jerusalem "debtors" was in no way an attempt to lord his ministry over them. In other passages, he makes this same connection. Here are two for consideration -

"If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?" 1 Corinthians 9:11

"Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches."
Galatians 6:6

Life application: From whom do you receive your spiritual things? Who is your teacher in the word of God and in Christian living? According to Paul, there is a debt which is to be paid in these matters. Take time to remember them in 1) prayer; 2) kind words and a gracious demeanor; 3) material things which will benefit them; 4) other assistance to them and their ministry.

Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. Romans 15:28

"Therefore" encompasses the thought which began in verse 22 and continued until verse 27. Based on what is stated in those verses, "Therefore, when I have performed this act..." This is the carrying of the offering from the gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to the needy saints in Jerusalem. He was determined to see this through personally. When the offering was placed in their hands, he will "have sealed to them this fruit."

Sealing in this case means the completion of the act. He will have faithfully performed his promised duty and will, in essence, have sealed it with a signet ring as a king would seal a decree or a noble would seal a letter. To seal something is to secure it. This is what he is implying. Only after that did he plan to "go by way of" Rome to Spain.

In Acts 20:4, we find that Paul had a large number of people from the various churches who traveled with him at times to ensure that all was handled circumspectly and openly -

"And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia."

Life application: When we begin a task in the Lord, it is right, fitting, and proper to see that task through to its completion. Likewise, the effort should be done openly and without any hint of impropriety. It is incumbent on all to ensure that the name of the Lord is glorified, not brought to dishonor, by our actions.

But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. Romans 15:29

Paul, writing to the Romans under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, stated that he knew that he would come to Rome. It was his hope that he would go on to Spain, but it was imparted knowledge that he would meet with the Roman church and that it would be "in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

In the book of Acts, it is exactly detailed from chapters 21-28 concerning how he finally made it to Rome. He went to Jerusalem as he anticipated and was subsequently arrested. Through a long and weary process, he was eventually taken in chains to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. There, still under guard in a type of house arrest as he awaited trial, this is how the book finishes out -

"Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." Acts 28:30, 31

The question is, "How could Paul's words have been fulfilled?" How could arrest and imprisonment be a "part of the blessing of the gospel of Christ?" The answer is that suffering for the gospel is one of the greatest blessings of all. On several

occasions, Paul speaks of the honor of such affliction. In writing to his young protégé Timothy, he gave this note of encouragement -

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God... 2 Timothy 1:8

And he wasn't just writing this as a mark of piety. He himself had suffered greatly for the gospel, including several imprisonments. Two examples of note make a direct connection between his chains and the advancement of the gospel -

"But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Philippians 1:12-14

"Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained." 2 Timothy 2:8, 9

The astonishing thing isn't that Paul made it to Rome in chains when he was anticipating doing so in the "fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." What is beyond belief is that we would miss the fact that our suffering is often God's way of being glorified and His way of advancing the gospel. Our suffering for Christ is a grant and an honor, not a mark of despair or disgrace. Should it come, remember the words of Paul to the Philippians -

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me." Philippians 1:29, 30

How easy it is to forget these things as we sit in latte-filled churches with cozy chairs and noisy bands to drown out the week's troubles.

The Bible and the gospel message turns the world upside down concerning what is expected and what is just, pure, and noble. The soundness of the Bible is demonstrated in the unexpected. When we ponder the stories that are written in Acts and then compare them to the words of the epistles, we can note how things were anticipated and how they actually occurred. And these two would otherwise be at complete odds with each other unless they occurred by the divine hand of God. As Godet says, "Would a forger of this epistle, in the second century, have drawn a picture of the future so opposite to the way in which things really came to pass?"

Life application: If you are expecting an easy life in Christ, then you probably aren't expecting to do very much for Christ.

Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,
Romans 15:30

Between two thoughts which reflect his desire to come to Rome (verses 29 & 32) Paul stops abruptly and requests "prayers to God" for him. This shows an extreme concern about his trip to Jerusalem which is resulting in no little consternation. He seems to know that things could go badly down there and he indicates as much explicitly in the following verse.

Because of this tenuous situation, he now begs the brethren "through the Lord Jesus Christ" to take action. The wording here can be interpreted in a variety of ways, such as "for," "through," or "by." If it is "for" then it is speaking of the honor of the Lord and the sanctity of His name. "Through" would indicate that the prayers were to be submitted to God "through" Jesus Christ as our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14) and the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

Either way, Paul is invoking the name of Christ in the process of prayers for safety. In addition to this, he also requested those prayers to be made "through the love of the Spirit." Again, a couple possibilities in meaning exist here. One is speaking of the love which the Spirit has endowed in the believer (which should certainly be the case in those who join in prayer) or he could mean the love which the Spirit feels toward the believer just as the Father and the Son love those who have been saved by the blood of Christ. In either way, the Spirit, like Christ Jesus, is to be invoked in the prayers. As often occurs, this is another implicit hint at the Trinity where Jesus, the Spirit, and God are all named in one verse.

It is through and to this Godhead that he now asks those in Rome to "strive together with" him "in prayers to God" for his mission to Jerusalem. The word for "to strive together with" is used only this once in the New Testament. It speaks of wrestling or agonizing together or sharing in a contest. This is what Paul is requesting - an honest struggling in prayer for the sake of his coming dealings in Jerusalem.

Throughout his writings, Paul holds the process and power of prayer in the very highest esteem. And he notes that when it is conducted in a group manner it is of great weight before God. This is noted, for example, in 2 Corinthians 1:11 -

"...you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many."

Life application: Is there an important matter ahead of you or someone you fellowship with? Make an effort to join together with them in prayer concerning it. When you do, remember that your prayers to God are to be submitted through Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to God. Our heavenly Father is pleased to receive such prayers and to respond to them according to our needs and in accordance with His perfect will.

...that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,... Romans 15:31

Paul just previously stated, "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me..." This then sets up what continues in verse 31. He is asking for these prayers so that he "may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe."

Before being called by Christ, he was a persecutor of the church. He was given letters to arrest those who followed in this new faith and he was even in attendance at the stoning of Stephen, Christianity's first recorded martyr. His standing in Judaism was well known and he was a Pharisee who had progressed beyond many around him. But with his conversion, all of that was over. Those Jews whom he once fellowshipped with would have considered him an apostate from the faith and would certainly intend him harm.

This is one reason he requested such fervent prayer. Along with this, even the believing Jews may have considered Paul a rogue. He was out ministering to the gentiles and in Acts 21:20-25 rumors had spread that he was teaching "all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs." (Acts 21:21)

Because of this, even those Jews who had accepted Christ were most assuredly wary of him. In order to alleviate such concerns, he had taken a vow under the Old Testament Nazirite system and was intending to complete the customs associated with that vow when he arrived in Jerusalem. This would help to dispel the notion that he had rejected his Jewish roots or that he would speak contrary to the customs of the Jewish people.

But in this verse, along with what has been noted so far, is another reason for his requesting of prayers. It is that "my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints." Because Paul was chosen as the "apostle to the gentiles," and because he had been slandered among his people, the saints in Jerusalem might very well not accept his offering to them. He also might not be sure if they would consider charity from the gentiles as an acceptable means of support. Further, even if they accepted what gentiles offered, they may not receive it because of Paul's position.

These things probably weighed heavy on him as he prepared to depart for Jerusalem.

It should be noted that even today, 2000 years later, old habits die hard. Within the body are many who are "weak in the faith" because of a lack of proper upbringing in Christ, or because they carried a lot of baggage along when they came to Christ. All people are at different levels of maturity and all people are prone to different types of failings. Because of this, what may be perfectly acceptable to one, may be shunned by another. We need to be empathic with those who have limitations which differ from us.

Life application: When facing a coming challenge of whatever sort, it is always best to precede meeting that challenge with prayer. Depending on the weight of what lies ahead, it may even be good to reach out to others for their prayer as well. Paul's letters show us that this is the preferred method of handling such things.

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