

Chapter 68

Paul's Plans

(Romans 15:22–29)

Paul now comes to speak of his plans. ²²*It is for this reason also that I have many times been prevented from coming to you.* Because he has been busy with the work in the area between Jerusalem and Illyricum, he has been delayed in coming to Rome. In verse 23 Paul starts a sentence which he does not finish. He planned to say something like this:

But now having no longer any place in these regions and having had a desire to come to you for many years, whenever I might go to Spain, I shall go on in my journey by way of you.

The end of his intended sentence ('I shall go on by way of you to Spain') does come in verse 28. But in verse 23, Paul started the sentence but did not finish it. ²³*But now having no longer any place in these regions and having had a desire to come to you for many years, whenever I might go to Spain.* Then he turns aside mid-sentence. He speaks of his wish to stay with them for some time. ²⁴*For I hope as I pass through to visit you and to be helped on my way by you while I am there. Perhaps I might first enjoy your company for a while.*

In verse 25 he explains another point. The collection of money for Jerusalem is also delaying his plans. ²⁵*But now I am going to*

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Jerusalem ministering to the saints. ²⁶*For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make some contribution for the needy people among the saints in Jerusalem.* ²⁷*For they were pleased and they are indebted to them. For if the gentiles have shared with them in spiritual blessings, then they are obliged in addition to assist them in material things.* Eventually he says what he had started saying in verse 23. ²⁸*Therefore when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I shall go on by way of you to Spain.* ²⁹*And I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.* A number of principles are of interest to us in all of this.

1. Paul stayed with a church-planting ministry until it was thoroughly established. Paul did not feel free to leave the Jerusalem-Illyricum areas until a certain point in the maturity of the churches had been reached.

2. When Paul's foundational church-planting work was done, then he felt obliged to move elsewhere.

3. Paul liked to work from a church base. He needed to work with the church that was nearest to the area which he wanted to reach. It also seems he gathered around him workers who lived near to the area where he wanted to work. Paul wanted his church base to know him well and be heartily in agreement with his message.

4. He liked to make sure the churches were helping each other financially. Jerusalem was a very poverty-stricken place in the AD 40s. Paul felt it was necessary for Christians outside Jerusalem to help the 'mother church' in its needs.

It is surprising to find that Paul who wants to go west to Spain is in fact going east to Jerusalem. One reason for this is that one secret of ministering to the saints financially is to stay personally involved! Leaders who assist in the giving of financial help had best do a lot of travelling to find out what is happening to their money!

He continues to explain: 'For Macedonia and Achaia were

pleased to make some contribution for the needy people among the saints in Jerusalem' (15:26). The gentile Christians of the provinces of Achaia and Macedonia were eager (after some persuasion – see 2 Corinthians) to take part in this work of helping the Jerusalem Christians.

'For they were pleased and they are indebted to them. For if the gentiles have shared with them in spiritual blessings, then they are obliged in addition to assist them in material things' (15:27). It is a basic principle that we support financially those who minister to us spiritually (see Galatians 6:6) but Paul is applying this principle on a large scale. Jerusalem brought the gentiles the Word of God! It was only fair that gentiles should support the one who had been a channel of blessing to them in the past.

Eventually Paul says what he had started saying in verse 23. 'Therefore when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit for them, I shall go on by way of you to Spain (15:28). And I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ (15:29).' He wants to settle what he has been doing (' . . . when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs . . . '). When he says he 'puts his seal' on the financial gift, he partly means he wants to see that the money arrives safe and sound, but probably he also means that he wants to make clear what it represents. He wants to put an 'identifying mark' on this gift. That is, he wants it rightly understood. It is an expression of Jewish-gentile Christian unity. It is a sign of unity between the first generation (Jerusalem) and the second generation (Antioch and its offshoots) of the Christians. It is an indication that there is one Christian movement in the world, not two, and that gentile Christians love and respect their Jewish mother, the church of Jerusalem.

He has his eye on the future. 'I shall go on by way of you to Spain', he says. Just as he had once made Antioch a base for ministry, and then Corinth and then Ephesus, so now he wants

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to use Rome as a base from which to travel further west. Paul had ambitions to serve God to the very end of his life. He had no plans to retire.

He expects to be enjoying ‘the fullness of the blessing of Christ’. When he had brought the thank-offering of financial support to Jerusalem, he then expects to travel west again and come to them in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. The phrase implies that there are higher and lower levels of blessing from Christ. The Christian does not stay at the same level of Christian experience all the time. His **experience** may be better at some times than at others. Paul went through many trials and troubles during these times and would eventually arrive in Rome as a prisoner, about three years after he wrote this letter. But his sufferings did not hold up the blessing of God. All through these three years he was speaking and writing in great confidence and joy. He had a good conscience. His responsibilities had been thoroughly carried out. He had his sights on Rome. It took three years to get there, and when he got there he was a prisoner. But he eventually arrived in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.