

Introduction

1. As Paul enters the closing portion of his letter he informs his readers of his plans:
  - a. He is on his way to Jerusalem to deliver some financial gifts to the poor among the believers there
  - b. He plans on going to Spain next, but not until after he stops to see the Romans on the way
2. There isn't much practical instruction here, but we get some personal insights into Paul

A. Paul recognized his need for others (22-24)

1. Paul had never met most of the believers in Rome, but longed to see them (22): **"For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; 23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you 24 whenever I go to Spain—"**
  - a. No one knows for sure who first brought the Gospel to Rome and started the first churches there
  - b. It's possible that Roman Jews who got saved at Pentecost took the Gospel back to Rome
  - c. It's also possible that others, like Priscilla and Acquilla, took the Gospel to Rome (they were there when Paul wrote to the Romans, apparently had a ministry to Gentiles, and had a church in their house in Rome—see 16:3-5b)
  - d. The letter indicates that Paul knew many believers in Rome because he greeting them by name in chapter 16, but there is no evidence that he ever traveled there before writing his letter
  - e. Even so, he writes that for many years he had been longing to visit them and hoped to do so when he got a chance to go to Spain
  - f. Now that his ministry in the regions surrounding Corinth was finished, he was hoping to finally see them as he traveled from Jerusalem to Spain.
2. Paul mentions two reasons why he longed to see them: **"for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while--"**
  - a. He sought their support for his ministry trip to Spain:
    - 1) The Greek word propempe, ("helped on my way") refers to sending someone on their way, sometimes with the implication that they will provide help for the journey
    - 2) In Acts (15:3; 20:38; 21:5) Luke used it to describe how believers accompanied Paul and his companions on part of their journey (to the city limits, to the ship, etc.)
    - 3) It's also used this way by Paul in 1 Corinthians (16:6; 16:11)
    - 4) However, in 2 Corinthians 1:16, Titus 3:13 and 3 John 1:6 it is used in a way that implies some sort of financial or material support
    - 5) The journey from Jerusalem to Spain was almost 4000 miles by ship and 5400 miles by land which would have required significant resources by Paul (average person in Paul's day could travel approx. 18 miles per day so it would have taken at least 300 days walking every day to get to Spain)
    - 6) So, it is likely that Paul was hoping for the material support of the Romans to help him in his journey to Spain

- b. In addition to their support, he sought their company: **“when I have first enjoyed your company for a while,”**
- 1) I love the word Paul uses here because it means to be filled up completely or satisfied
  - 2) Most translations render it like the NAU—**“when I have first enjoyed your company”**
  - 3) But to me that sounds a little too much like a formal British tea party <grin>
  - 4) I prefer to take it a bit more literally—Paul was anxious to get his fill of them, to be completely full and satisfied by their fellowship

Trips back to IBC in Wausau on Seminary breaks—seeing the folks there was a huge part of my being refreshed and recharged for heading into another semester

- 5) I believe this is the same thing that was behind Paul’s desire for their company—look at how he started the letter (1:9-12): **“For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, 10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.”**
3. I think if we were to ask Paul whether his life and ministry were possible without the help and support of other believers within the body of Christ we would get a resounding “no”:
  - a. He relied on them for encouragement and fellowship as seen in this passage
  - b. He relied on them for support, including material and financial (2 Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:15-18)
  - c. And, as we’ll see in vs. 30-32, he relied upon them for their prayers
4. Have you ever reflected on how important the body of Christ is to you? How about the Renew family? In what ways do you rely on this body?

B. Paul was motivated by the needs of others (25-29)

1. There is no question that Paul’s ministry was driven by the needs of others:
  - a. He preached the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles because they needed salvation:
    - 1) Romans 9:1-3: **“I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,”**
    - 2) Romans 10:1: **“Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.”**
  - b. He wrote letters to the churches because they needed to be encouraged and to grow in their faith—nearly every one of his letters is filled with theological teaching and practical application so that, as he says in Colossians 1:28, he might **“present every man complete (mature) in Christ”**

2. But here in Romans 15 we see another side to Paul—a desire to meet the physical needs of poor saints in Jerusalem (25-27): **"but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. 28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain."**
  - a) This passage might give the impression that Paul was merely delivering a gift to Jerusalem provided by churches in Macedonia and Achaia
  - b) However, we learn in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 (**Read**) that Paul had directed at least some of the churches he visited on his ministry journey to set aside money for the poor saints in Jerusalem (He even reminded the Corinthians about this in 2 Corinthians 8-9)
  - c) So Paul wasn't just some mere delivery boy—he was an active leader in seeing that the needs of the poor saints were taken care of by those who could help
  - d) He was motivated by the poor's need for help
  - e) He saw it as serving them
  - f) He saw it as making good on an obligation—the Gentiles (his primary ministry) owed the saints in Jerusalem materially because they had received from them spiritual things (e.g. salvation through the Gospel which originated with the Jews)
  - g) He took this matter so seriously that he wanted to personally deliver it to Jerusalem himself to ensure that the entire gift was delivered and received (the concept of putting a seal on something such as grain or food in Paul's day was a way of ensuring its contents)
  
3. Paul was not too busy, nor was he too focused on his primary calling and ministry, to overlook the physical needs of other believers who needed help

C. Paul coveted the prayers of others (30-33)
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1. Paul uses some strong language here to encourage his readers to pray for him (30): **"Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,"**
  - a. Some translations render the word **"urge"** found in the NASB as **"appeal"** or **"implore"**—it's a word that implies an earnest request or a pleading
  - b. The word translated **"strive"** in its simplest form means to engage in conflict:
    - 1) Paul uses it here metaphorically
    - 2) It's a rather interesting word picture because it implies engaging in prayer with a certain intensity or diligence
    - 3) He might have in mind the kind of praying he wrote about in Colossians 4:12 when he described Epaphras: **"Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis."**
  - c. One reason for the intensity of Paul's request here was because he knew the danger he faced going to Jerusalem:
    - 1) The unbelieving Jews hated him for his ministry to the Gentiles and were constantly plotting to kill him (Acts 9:23; 20:3; 21:31; 23:21)

- 2) One of the last cities Paul visited on his trip to Jerusalem was Tyre and the disciples there warned him not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4): **"When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. 4 After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem."**
- 3) When he arrived at Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea—the very place Paul was heading—and prophesied that Paul would be taken prisoner (**READ Acts 21:7-14**)
- 4) In fact, once Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the Jews seized him, began to beat him to death until he was rescued by the Romans (**READ Acts 21:27-36**)
- 5) Is it possible, that facing this, Paul had his own Jesus-in-the-Garden moment? As Jesus faced the cross, he struggled in prayer in the garden, and like Paul, asked others (His disciples) to pray while he prayed.

NOTE: It's worth noting that Paul was risking his life here in order to deliver a financial gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem. That was his primary purpose in going to Jerusalem and he was willing to risk his life for it.

2. Paul asks them to pray for three things (31-32): **"that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company."**
  - a. Deliverance from unbelieving Jews in Judea
  - b. That his gift to the saints in Jerusalem would be acceptable to them
  - c. To still make it to Rome (this third phrase is actually a purpose clause reflecting what Paul hopes is the outcome or result of their prayers)
3. God ultimately did answer Paul's prayers and those who prayed for him:
  - a. He was rescued from the Jews by Roman imprisonment (the Jews tried to kill him when he first arrived and then again 40 Jews plotted to hijack and kill him when the Romans were preparing to transport him to Rome)
  - b. He ultimately made it to Rome as part of his trial and imprisonment

Conclusion
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1. Like Paul, we should never lose site of the fact that we need one another
2. Like Paul, we should be moved by one another's needs and motivated to minister to one another
3. And, like Paul, we should covet one another's prayers