

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 15:14-33**  
**Notes from Tuesday May 24, 2011**  
**Last Revised on May 31, 2011**

**Songs**

**Opening Prayer**

**Introduction**

This evening we continue our study of the **Letter of Paul to the Romans**.

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Last week we began **Chapter 15**.

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Tonight we will **finish** Chapter 15.

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For those of you who were not here last week, please note that the class voted to begin a new study, of the New Testament Book of **Revelation**, starting on **July 5**. (Hand out survey results.)

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This will give everyone a long **break** during the month of **June**.

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Several of you have expressed a desire to have a “**celebration**” next week, Let’s discuss that this evening before we go home.

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As always, let’s begin our study this evening with a very quick **review**.

**Review**

The **overall** theme of Paul’s letter to the Romans is the **gospel**,

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which Paul sets forth briefly in the **first four (4) chapters** of this letter.

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In the **next** four chapters (i.e. Chapters 5 - 8), Paul examines some of the **implications** of the gospel, for those of us who are being **saved** by it.

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In the third major section of this letter, consisting of **Chapters 9 through 11**, Paul examines the **sad** history of the Jews who have **rejected** the gospel, but who have thereby served to manifest God’s grace and mercy, and who are somehow the **ultimate object** of God’s mercy, Paul says.

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It is on the basis of these “***mercies of God,***” (as set forth in the first **11** chapters of this letter)

that Paul calls for proper Christian **behavior**, in the last major section of this letter, which runs from the beginning of **Chapters 12** through, the **Verse 13 of Chapter 15**.

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This is the section of the letter that we have been studying **recently**, and **finished** last week.

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To summarize that last section: we are to put the interests of **others** before our **own** interests, and sincerely love **everyone**.

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Our best example in this is Christ himself, who came to save the **Jews**, that he might also save the **whole world**, and put **himself** last of all.

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Such is the **character** of our **God** as ultimately revealed in **Christ**.

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This is a quick review of all that we have studied in Romans through **Verse 13** of **Chapter 15**,

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which marks the end of the body of Paul's letter to the Romans,

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What follows next, from Verse 14 of Chapter 15 through the end of Chapter 16 is the **conclusion** of this letter.

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Are there any questions or comments before we read it?

### **Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 15, Verses 14-16**

OK, then, will someone please read Romans 15, Verses 14 through 16, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

**14 I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.**

**15 But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God**

**16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

Thank you.

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Last week we read to the end of verse 13, which is a kind of a final hope and prayer for the Romans: *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”*

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The concluding section of this letter, begins in Verse 14, as we just read, with Paul saying that he himself has little doubt that his hope and prayer for the Romans will indeed be fulfilled.

**(Verse 14)**

**I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.**

Paul is not just being **kind**, I think, nor is he being **ironical**. He is simply being **accurate**.

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This far into the letter, I think it is right to understand Paul as saying to the Romans very **frankly** what he thinks of them.

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And what Paul thinks of them is that they do not especially **need** Paul or his personal teaching.

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They were already Christians **before** he wrote to them.

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He did not **establish** their church, as he had done so many others.

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He has not yet even **visited** them.

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He **does** know some **people** there, as we shall see in Chapter 16, people whom he knows **well** and **loves** and with whom he has done **ministr**.

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And based on what Paul knows **of** those people, and **from** those people, and based on all that he knows from various sources **about the church** in Rome, Paul is satisfied that they have a sufficient stock of their own **goodness** and **knowledge** to counsel **themselves**, without hanging around waiting for Paul.

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Q. **Why** does Paul say this?

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A. He means to make it clear that he does not think highly of **himself** or lowly of **them**, so that they can put into proper **context** all that he has **written** in this long letter, and so that they can put into the proper **perspective**, Paul's **upcoming visit**.

**(Verse 15)**

**But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God**

Paul is **not** the founder of their church or a **teacher** of things that are new to them.

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But he has written much to them by way of **reminder**.

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And he has written **boldly** --- i.e. with some authority.

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Q. Why? (Why has we written as he has?)

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A. Because **everyone** needs to be reminded.

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A. And because God has **appointed** him to be a minister of Christ to the gentiles.

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A. And because there were many **gentiles** in the church in Rome.

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A. And because Rome was the **capital** of the gentile world.

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Verse 16 says that God had graciously **made** Paul...

**(Verse 16)**

**to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

Paul saw himself as something like an Old Testament **priest**.

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In the Old Testament, priests were appointed to offer **sacrifices** to God

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The sacrifices provided **by** the people were to be without blemish and ritually pure

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Paul saw what he did as something like that, only he offered to God **living human** sacrifices,

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these were the men and women who had been made **perfect, pure, and holy** by the Spirit of God,

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including **gentile** believers like those who were in the church in Rome.

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Paul felt that gentile believers fell within his **special area of responsibility** within the church,

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as assigned by **God**.

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He goes on to speak of this work in the verses which follow.

**Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 15, Verses 17-24**

Will someone please read Romans 15, Verses 17 through 24, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

**17 In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.**

**18 For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience---by word and deed,**

**19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God---so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;**

**20 and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,**

**21 but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."**

**22 This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.**

**23 But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you,**

**24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.**

Thank you.

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Verse 17 reads.

**(Verse 17)**

**In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.**

In what went before, Paul spoke of his “**priestly service**”

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But the work that Paul does is not “**Paul's work.**”

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It is the **continuation** of the **work of Christ.**

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It is not even work that Paul does **for** or **in service to** Christ,

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It is work which **Christ himself** continues to do **through** Paul.

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So whatever reason **Paul** has to be proud, has **nothing** to do with Paul.

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Verses 18 and 19 continue

**(Verses 18 and 19)**

**For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience---by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God---so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;**

The only good that Paul was able to accomplish, is what **Christ** accomplished **through** him.

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This must be a terribly **humbling** experience: to know that he himself accomplished nothing.

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Maybe we have something similar when we read in the Old Testament that “*Moses was the humblest man on earth,*”

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Q. So what **did** God accomplish through Paul?

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A. **Ultimately** the **bringing of the gentiles to obedience**. (i.e. faith)

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A. The means of achieving this included **word**, **deed**, **signs**, and **wonders**, all of which went forth by the power of the Spirit of God. It **wasn't** Paul who did these things.

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Yet it **was** Paul (and not someone else) in the sense that God chose to work through Paul in order to accomplish all of these things, all the way from **Jerusalem** to **Illyricum**. (il lir e kem)

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Reference to these two cities sort of sets the **endpoints** of Paul's ministry as described in Acts.

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It is not clear that Paul had much of a ministry in Jerusalem, **proper**. He wanted to work there but Christ sent him away.

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Neither is there any evidence that Paul got quite as far **north** as Illyricum.

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But in the towns and cities from Jerusalem to Illyricum (**not inclusive**) Paul accomplished

much by the grace of God.

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Verse 20 continues

**(Verse 20)**

**and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,**

Paul's ministry mostly was away from Jerusalem and out in the gentile world,

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and mostly done in places where few if any other Christians had been before.

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Paul understood, and rightly, that this was where God wanted him to preach the gospel,

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because that was where God did the job through him!!

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This was how and where the words, deeds, signs, and wonders happened.

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So Paul stuck with that --- he made it, he says, his ambition to do that.

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And he saw that as fulfillment of the words of Isaiah (ISA52.15) remembered in Verse 21

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which reads:

**(Verse 21)**

**but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."**

Paul understood his theater of operation as being where there were "*those who have never been told of him and those who have never heard.*"

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This explains why Paul has still not visited Rome.

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Because there is already a self-sufficient church in Rome, and because there are still other places where Christ has not been proclaimed and, therefore, where Paul feels constrained to go.

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Verse 22 reads:

**(Verse 22)**

**This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.**

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This echoes what Paul said in the opening chapter of this letter,

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where he wanted them to understand that his not having visited was not a demonstration of his lack of affection or respect for them.

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He loved them, sure enough, but he was busy. And his lack of attention was, if anything, a sign of his respect for the stock of goodness and knowledge that he knew them to possess, and for the teaching of others who had preceded him there.

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Can you see that, if Paul visits Rome, it will not be for the same reasons that he visits other places.

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There are still plenty of other places where Paul could go and be first to proclaim the gospel,

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But if opportunity should present itself, for Paul to stop and visit in Rome *en route* to new mission fields farther west, then he thinks that would be enjoyable and constructive.

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Verses 23 and 24 read:

**(Verses 23 and 24)**

**But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.**

Any questions or comments before we read on?

### **Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 15, Verses 25-29**

OK, then, will someone please read Romans 15, Verses 25 through 29, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

**25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.**

**26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.**

**27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.**



**28 When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.**

**29 I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.**

Thank you.

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As we read before, Paul is hoping to stop off in **Rome** en route to **Spain**,

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but first he needs to travel in the opposite direction and visit **Jerusalem**.

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In view of what he has said before, this might seem a strange **detour**.

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So it merits some **explanation**, which Paul gives.

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Verses 25 and 26 read:

**(Verses 25 and 26)**

**At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.**

As we know from reading Acts and the Corinthian correspondence, Paul has taken up a **collection** among some of the predominately **gentile** churches for the relatively poor and predominately **Jewish** Christians in Jerusalem.

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And Paul, accompanied by some others, intends to deliver this donation **personally**.

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It is interesting that Paul feels he needs to deliver the collection personally, when he so obviously desires to be first in Rome (for **fellowship**) and then in Spain (for **evangelism**).

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This is especially interesting when we realize that Paul is **unpopular** in Jerusalem and knows that it is **dangerous** for him to travel there.

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Indeed we know from Acts that many Christians were **begging** Paul not to go there.

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Perhaps this is precisely **why** Paul needed to go in person.

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Charity is important, **too, particularly** when the objects of our charity are ungrateful.

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The gentile churches, if you think of it, generally are the “**strong**” in the sense that Paul was writing about in the preceding chapter and the Jewish church in Jerusalem is generally “**weak**” in that sense.

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It behooves the strong to **welcome** and **bear with the failings** of the weak as Paul has just reminded the Romans,

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it likewise behoves the relatively **wealthy** to share with the relatively **poor**,

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and it behooves the **wild olive branches** to honor the **native root** onto which they have been grafted.

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From Paul’s perspective, then, for these and other reasons, this trip to Jerusalem **had** to happen

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Paul touches on this in Verse 27 and uses it as a teaching opportunity for the Romans as well.

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Verse 27 reads

**(Verse 27)**

**For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.**

It may be that Paul is encouraging the Romans to **also** consider giving support to the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

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Certainly he is reinforcing the lesson which he taught earlier in the letter about the **respect** with which gentile Christians needed to look upon the **Jews**.

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Finally he is explaining, **yet again**, why he cannot yet come to Rome directly, but must wait to finish this important charity mission.

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Verse 28 reads:

**(Verse 28)**

**When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.**

This does not necessarily mean that Paul ever **went** to Spain.

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It only means for sure that it was Paul's **intention** to do so.

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Of course we do know that Paul **did** travel from Jerusalem to **Rome**,

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but this was a trip in which he was a **prisoner**.

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He may never have had the **freedom** to travel on to Rome.

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Secular history is **unclear** on this point.

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And the Bible is **silent**.

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Verse 29 reads:

**(Verse 29)**

**I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.**

I find this statement **interesting**.

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It **may** mean that Paul is so confident of the **Roman Christians** that he is simply looking forward to seeing them, knowing that a time of fellowship with them will be such a blessing and refreshment for **Paul**, as well as for the Romans.

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It may, on the other hand, mean that Paul is so confident of the blessing of God upon his current mission that he is certain that his arrival in Rome will bring **to them** the fullness of the blessings of Christ.

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It may, I suppose, mean **both** things.

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But regardless of its specific focus, Paul's confidence that his trip to Rome would be full of blessing is interesting in light of the fact that when Paul finally did arrive in Rome he would be a **prisoner**.

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And **despite** the fact that he arrived as a prisoner, we do get the feeling from Acts and Philippians and the other Prison Letters that Paul's arrival in Rome truly was, in a peculiarly **Christian** sort of way, full of blessing for Paul himself and for the church **everywhere** and for **all time**.

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And I suppose that Paul was not **too** surprised when his longed for trip to Rome became a strange and difficult trip into Roman **captivity**, given the prayer that he requests in the following verses.

**Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 15, Verses 30-33**

Will someone please read Romans 15, Verses 30 through 33, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

**30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,**

**31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,**

**32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.**

**33 May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.**

Thank you.

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Paul has now made it amply clear that he intends to **visit Rome, en route to Spain, after visiting Jerusalem** to deliver the collection taken in Macedonia and Achaia.

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Furthermore he has also expressed **confident assurance** that when he arrives **in Rome** it will be in the **fullness of the blessings of Christ**.

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Yet Paul does not expect this to be **easy**.

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On the contrary, I think Paul is expecting significant **difficulty**.

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He will be in **prayer** about it; and he invites the Romans to pray **with** him and **for** him.

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Verse 30 reads:

**(Verse 30)**

**I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,**

and Paul even suggests, in Verse 31, the content of these prayers:

**(Verse 31)**

**that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,**

Paul is concerned that **Jews who oppose Christ** may come against him violently, as they have often done in the past.

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and Paul is concerned that **Jewish Christians** may oppose Paul or the offering that he is bringing from the gentile churches.

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In any case Paul **knows** he is heading into a crowd of people who are prone to be **hostile** toward him.

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He cannot **avoid** them; his mission requires him to **face** these people.

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His **only** hope, other than to refuse the journey, is to ask for **God's** protection and deliverance.

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He invites **others** to pray for him as well.

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On objective of these prayers, Paul says in Verse 32, is

**(Verse 32)**

**so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.**

Of course Paul will come to them (or not) in accordance with **God's will**.

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This is one of the things Jesus chiefly taught us about prayer:

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“Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed by they name, thy kingdom come, **they will be done...**”

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And in the Garden of Gethsemane: **“...not my will but thy will be done..”**

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Yet Jesus asked, **“...if it be possible, let this cup pass..”**

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And Jesus invited his **friends** to wait with him while he prayed in the garden.

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And here Paul invites **his** friends in Rome to join him in prayer that, ***“by God's will,”*** he will come to them with joy and be refreshed by their company.

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Yet we know that for both **Jesus** and **Paul**, and for many Christians who have followed in the years gone by, **God's will** has often been extremely **difficult** and very **different** from what

they and their friends would ever have thought to seek in prayer!

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Q. How shall we **understand** this?

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A. We must **always** desire that God's will be done, no matter how difficult.

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A. We may **always** make our desires known to God.

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A. It is **good** to invite our friends to pray with us and for us, and to pray with and for our friends.

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A. We must not be surprised or discouraged when our prayers are answered **"no"**

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Q. So what is the **point** of praying? Q. Does praying have any real **power**?

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A. Prayer is the **most** powerful thing of which we are capable.

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A. It is the power of **God** moving **in** us.

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A. It brings us into **conformance** with the will of God's.

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A. When we pray in conformance with the will of God, the answer is **always** "yes"

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Chapter 15 ends

**(Verse 33)**

**May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.**

**Closing Prayer**