



# UNIT 27—Paul the Minister/Romans 15:14-33

## TEXT

### *Paul the Minister to the Gentiles*

<sup>14</sup>I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. <sup>15</sup>I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me <sup>16</sup>to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>17</sup>Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. <sup>18</sup>I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— <sup>19</sup>by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. <sup>20</sup>It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. <sup>21</sup>Rather, as it is written:

"Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."<sup>a</sup>

<sup>22</sup>This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

### *Paul's Plan to Visit Rome*

<sup>23</sup>But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, <sup>24</sup>I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. <sup>25</sup>Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. <sup>26</sup>For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup>They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the

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## STUDY

### READ

#### **First Reading / First Impressions**

What do you admire about Paul from this passage?

#### **Second Reading / Big Idea**

How would you sum up Paul's driving goal in one sentence?

### SEARCH

1. Since Paul had never visited this church, why might he feel the need to include verses 14-16?

2. In what ways does the image of a priest describe Paul's ministry? (v. 16)

3. Illyricum is in present-day Yugoslavia. How far is that from Jerusalem? What does that say about Paul?

4. What has God accomplished through the ministry of Paul? (vv. 18-19)

5. In light of his ambition (v.20), why has Paul not visited Rome before?

6. Outline Paul's anticipated travel plans from verses 24-29.

7. Why would referring to the offering collected by the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia (regions in present-day Greece) be especially appropriate to the Roman church, with its Jew-Gentile tensions?

8. What concerns may Paul be facing that he asks the people to pray for him? (Acts 20:22-24)

## APPLY

Looking over your schedule and priorities of this past month, what would an on-looker say is your major ambition in life?

What do you want it to be?

What can you do this week to help that ambition become more of a reality?

Prayer Inventory. Take a look at the scope of Paul's concern on the world map and compare his world vision to your own. Jot down in the concentric circles—beginning with ME and MY FAMILY—the people, places or needs that you pray about or are concerned about.

ME and MY FAMILY

MY CHURCH

MY COMMUNITY

THE WHOLE WORLD

# GROUP AGENDA

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

## TO BEGIN/10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What is the most distant place you have visited? ☐ If you could visit any place in the world, what would it be? ☐ As a child, what do you remember about the first time you were away from home without your parents? ☐ What did you put down for READ?

## TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next person answering 2, etc. ☐ In light of all the demands that Paul laid on the Christians in Rome in the last three chapters, how does he come across in this passage? ☐ How would you describe Paul's ministry from this passage? ☐ Case History: Melissa says, "Why do you have to bother praying since God al-

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Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. <sup>28</sup>So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. <sup>29</sup>I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

<sup>30</sup>I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. <sup>31</sup>Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, <sup>32</sup>so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. <sup>33</sup>The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

<sup>a21</sup> Isaiah 52:15

# NOTES ON ROMANS 15:14-33

**Summary/Romans 15:14-22.** Paul brings his letter to a close (prior to his postscript in chapter 16 in which he greets various friends) by discussing (1) his apostleship and hence his authority to write as he does (vv. 14-22), and (2) his travel plans—to go first to Jerusalem (to deliver a collection for the poor) and then to Spain, stopping *en route* in Rome (vv. 23-33).

v. 14 These are *not* words of flattery designed to win over a hostile audience. One sentence would hardly suffice in light of the preceding chapters. Rather, he seems to feel that to write such specific instructions for behavior (as he has done in 12:1—15:13) to a church he has never visited, might seem overly bold (v. 15), even presumptuous. So he hastens to assure them that indeed he does consider them to be mature Christians.

**full of goodness** . . . they love one another, frankly and sincerely.

**complete in knowledge** . . . they understand God's truth—what the gospel is and what it requires.

**competent to instruct** . . . of sound moral and intellectual character, they can work

out their own problems, i.e., correcting the wrong in one another and encouraging each other to righteous living.

v. 15 **boldly** . . . Paul's words might appear bold in that he had neither founded nor visited the church in Rome. He may fear, especially, offending either of the two groups (the weak and the strong) referred to in 14:1-15:13.

**on some points** . . . probably 12:1—15:13 in which he addresses specific issues of Christian behavior.

**remind you** . . . his first reason for writing is simply to remind them of the truth they already know.

v. 16 **a minister** . . . in Greek, the word is *leitourgos*, the word from which *liturgy* is derived. In its original use it designated patriotic tasks voluntarily undertaken on behalf of Greece such as financing a choir, training an athletic team, or paying the expenses of a naval warship. The idea of "generous service" underlies this word. By God's grace (v. 15) Paul is such a minister, and his responsibilities include writing as he has done to the Romans.

**priestly duty** . . . Paul speaks of his role as a minister in priestly terms: The Gentiles are the offering he presents to God. They have been made pure (sanctified) by the Holy Spirit. His is a holy service, similar to that of the Jewish priests.

vv. 18-19 Paul has been made a minister to the Gentiles. He has faithfully fulfilled this calling and has seen fruit from his ministry. But all he will talk about is what Christ did through him. Hence his

reference to "*the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit*" which brought about belief in Christ on the part of the Gentiles.

v. 19 **signs and miracles** . . . see Acts 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4.

**Illyricum** . . . a Roman province on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, situated roughly where Yugoslavia now is. Paul has preached throughout the northeastern Mediterranean, establishing churches in the major cities. Although no specific mention is made elsewhere of ministry here, it could well have come in A.D. 55 or 56 (see 2 Corinthians 2:12f) when Paul was in Macedonia which shared a border with Illyricum.

v. 20 Paul understands his call to be that of a pioneer missionary.

v. 22 The demands of such pioneer missionary activity have thus far prevented a visit to Rome.

v. 23 Paul is *not* saying that there is no further work to be done in that region but simply that his presence is no longer required since the pioneer work has been completed.

v. 24 **Spain** . . . the Roman colony of Spain was situated at the edge of the civilized world—no doubt the reason that Paul's pioneering spirit was drawn there. Still, it was no cultural backwater. The poet Lucian came from there as did Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, and the emperors Trajan, Hadrian, and Theodosius I. Although Paul was arrested and

## GROUP AGENDA continued

ready knows what's going to happen anyway?" What is your answer?

## TO CLOSE/5-20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What did you jot down for APPLY? ☐ How would you compare Paul's concern for God's work all over the world with your own ambitions? Values? Concern for God's kingdom? ☐ What about Paul's commitment do you most want to see in your life? What step can you take this week toward that goal?

imprisoned prior to realizing the plans he outlines here, he just might have gone to Spain. An ancient document written in Rome (ca. A.D. 95) states that prior to his martyrdom, Paul "came to the extreme limit of the West" which is almost surely Spain.

**visit** . . . among other reasons, Paul has written this letter as a means of introduction to the church in Rome which he hopes will support his missionary activity in Spain. Though he does not specify what assistance he hopes for, it probably included material aid as well as prayer and fellowship, and perhaps even a companion from the church who was knowledgeable about Spain.

- v. 25-27 The collection for the poor in Jerusalem is on the order of a debt for Paul. As he writes in Galatians 2:10, when he was commissioned by the church to be the apostle to the Gentiles, the only request they had was that he remember the poor. This was no new concern. Once before he and Barnabas had brought a similar gift to Jerusalem from the Christians in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:30 and 12:25). Such a gift of love could aid the unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians as well as be a model of appropriate response to human need.

- v. 26 **for the poor . . . in Jerusalem** . . . As Barclay points out, "Much of the available employment in Jerusalem was connected with the Temple and surely there was job discrimination against those who had become Christians since the Temple and its officials stood as the enemies of Christ."

**Macedonia and Achaia** . . . two Roman provinces located south of Illyricum, on a peninsula bordering the Adriatic and Aegean Seas, in the region of modern Greece. These were not the only territories that contributed (1 Corinthians 16:1 and Acts 20:4). They are probably mentioned because at the time that Paul wrote *Romans* he was living in this region.

- v. 27 **pleased** . . . a voluntary gift; a moral debt *not* a legal levy by the mother church.
- v. 31 Paul has experienced hostility from unbelieving Jews as well as suspicion from converted Jews, the latter over his ministry to the Gentiles.