

**TUTORIAL**  
**3.18**

# Paul's Ministry Plans

Bible presenter Scot Keen concludes our study on the book of Romans in this tutorial. He discusses Paul's ministry plans and his final comments to the church in Rome.

## Introduction

In this tutorial, we come to the conclusion of our study of the book of Romans. We will be looking at Romans 15:14 to 16:27, and the first part of this is Paul's ministry plans as he communicates his plans to the church in Rome.

## Purpose in ministry

Look at Romans 15:14. Paul says, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another." Paul recognises that the believers in the church in Rome were able to teach and to build each other up in the faith. Paul acknowledges that they were not without teaching. However, his desire was to take them further in their growth in the Lord. "But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God" (Romans 15:15). When Paul speaks about the grace that was given to him in this context, he is not talking about grace for salvation but rather grace for ministry. He is talking about his ministry as an apostle and the gifts he was given to carry out his role.

Paul continues, "The grace ... was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God." The Gentiles were Paul's target audience. The book of Galatians reveals that Peter was an apostle to the Jews, whereas Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles. They were his primary target audience. He was given this grace to be a minister to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the Gospel of God. There are a few beautiful images there. First of all, Paul ministers the Gospel. But his ministry of the Gospel was more than, "Christ died for your sins and rose again." He is speaking about a Gospel that has the power to build up believers.

I especially want to call attention to the figurative speech that Paul uses when he says *ministers as a priest of the Gospel*. He is using Old Testament imagery. Priests would represent God to the Israelites and lead them in worship to God. They would bring a sacrifice and give it to God as an act of worship. Paul pictures himself as a priest. He is a minister of the Gospel on God's behalf and he presents a gift to the Lord as a priest, and that gift being the Gentile churches.

Paul beautifully illustrates this concept for us. He sees himself bringing the Gentile church to maturity and then presenting it as his gift to God, an act of worship. In other words, Paul's ministry of discipleship was ultimately doxological. It was an act of worship towards God to be able to present these believers to the Lord. In verse fifteen Paul says, "So that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the holy spirit." Note the sacrificial language he uses there.

Paul wants to see Gentile churches become mature so he can present them to God, and yet he recognises that with all of his efforts, it is going to be the Spirit of God that ultimately matures believers, as he says, "sanctified by the holy spirit." That was his goal: to worship God by presenting sanctified churches to God. And we know his goal was met because he says, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God" (Romans 15:17). His goal was met. There are grounds for rejoicing, but he wants to make it very clear that he is not the one who met his goal. "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed" (Romans 15:18). Paul saw Gentiles become obedient by word and deed to the living God as he went about his ministry.

This illustration mirrors an event that took place in Ephesus. The believers there came forward confessing their magical practises and burned all the books of their incantations, an act which communicated that they were making a clean break from their idolatry. Although Paul was involved in this, he says that the credit did not go to him but to the glorified Christ who accomplished it, "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ accomplished through me." Paul knew that Christ was the one who accomplished this momentous event through Paul's ministry.

The same thing took place in Thessalonica. Paul says the believers there turned from idols to serve the living and true God. As you consider how God might use you to reach the nations with the Gospel, be encouraged that it is ultimately the living Christ who is working through you to accomplish His purposes in history. We can step out in faith and obedience to obey the Great Commission, knowing that God is going to be there, working through us frail instruments. And this is not limited to the first century, but even today the Gentiles (the nations) are becoming obedient to the faith. I could tell you story

after story. I recently heard a testimony of a man who used to be a cannibal in an isolated people group in Papua New Guinea, and now he follows God. And that happened because of what the living Christ is doing through people who are faithful to take the Gospel Message to others.

And so Paul was excited about the Gentiles coming to Christ because it came about by God's power. The miracles that the apostles performed were called wonders, which speaks of the impact they had on those who observed them. Remember that they were accomplished by power of the Spirit. So Paul went about performing apostolic signs which accomplished several things, such as validating his apostolic message and gaining an ear for the Gospel, which in turn led to people coming to faith in Christ. And Paul fully preached the Gospel of Christ, he says, from Jerusalem round about Illyricum.

Paul's focus was on the unreached people groups. He preached the Gospel fully all around Illyricum. When we look at a map, we can see the impact that the Gospel had through Paul, all the way from Jerusalem and Damascus into Syria and Antioch, and then all the way up to Illyricum. We would not even know that Paul was there, were it not for Romans chapter fifteen. The Gospel spread in vast regions because of Paul's ministry, and ultimately because of what Christ did through him.

As I mentioned, Paul's focus was on unreached people groups. His desire was to reach out to them. In Romans 15:20, he tells us that he aspired to preach the Gospel where Christ was not named so that he would not build on another man's foundation. Paul focused on places where Christ had not been named, and his goal and heart's desire was to see them reached with the Gospel. He backs up his unique focus using an Old Testament passage, "As it is written, they who had no news of him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand" (Isaiah 52). Paul knew that it was God's desire for him to take the Gospel to the unreached, and that is exactly what he did.

## Intent to visit Rome

Paul explains that it was for that reason that he has not made it to Rome yet. He shares his intention to visit Rome in this next section, and discloses that his intent was previously unrealized because of his focus on the unreached. In verse twenty-two he says *for this reason*. For what reason? Well, for the reason that he was focusing on places where Christ had not been named. "For that reason," Paul says, "I have often been prevented from coming to you." Paul could not justify in his mind going to Rome (where there were believers) when there were other places where no one had heard the Gospel. And so that had prevented him from getting to Rome up until the point of writing this. But now Paul says, "With no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain- for I hope to see you in passing."

Paul has reached the world with the Gospel in the places where he has travelled. He is not saying that every village has heard the Gospel, but that he had planted churches in key locations and is now ready to move to the regions beyond to see those places reached. And so he tells the Roman believers that he wants to see them on his way to Spain. We can deduce from this that he had further regions in mind. He had preached the Gospel in many parts of the world, but he wanted to go further and he wanted the church in Rome to partner with him in this. He wanted them to send him on his way, "I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you" (Romans 15:24). Paul wants them to partner with him (probably financially) and help him get to Spain, and in that way, they too would be a part of that ministry. But he first wants to enjoy their company for a while.

Paul also mentions an excursion that he is going to take. He wants to go to Rome, followed by Spain, but will stop at Jerusalem first, "But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Romans 15:25). We read about this particularly in 2 Corinthians. Paul has been collecting a generous offering from the saints throughout the world, Gentile churches, to take to the poor believers in Jerusalem. This is an amazing thing that Paul is doing.

Paul gives the reason that the Gentile churches gave for giving, "They were pleased to do this, 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" (Romans 15:27). Paul says that the Gentiles have shared in the Jewish salvation, the Jewish Messiah. And because they have shared in that, they should share back with the home church where it all began, in Jerusalem.

And Paul wants to be a part of this. Look at verse twenty-eight, "Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs," the fruit meaning their love offering, "I will go on by way of you to Spain." Paul will take this love offering to the believers in Jerusalem. Now, this would have been a fearful thing for Paul because he would not have known how this gift would be received.

## **Request for prayer**

Look at the prayer request that Paul gives in verse Romans 15:30. He says, "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." He says *pray for me*. And specifically, pray "that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints." He has two prayer requests. He wants to be rescued from attackers on his way to Jerusalem. Paul will tell us in the books of Acts that the Spirit testifies that bonds and afflictions await him in Jerusalem. God had revealed to Paul that he

would be persecuted there. And so he asks prayer that he would be rescued from them so that he could continue his ministry.

He also prays that the church in Jerusalem would receive the financial gift he wants to give them. That might seem like an odd prayer request. Usually we do not pray that someone will accept the money we give them, as it is generally a given that they will. Paul knows that this could be an issue because, if Jewish Christians accept money from Gentile Christians, it might make it hard for the Jewish Christians to reach out to Jewish unbelievers. But if they reject this gift, then it would be an insult to the sacrificial giving of the Gentile believers. And so Paul is bathing this in prayer and asking others to pray about it as well.

Paul's ultimate desire is found in verse thirty-two, that he might, "Come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company." He prays that he will get to Rome to be with them. Now, if you have read the book of Acts you will know that Paul did make it to Rome, but he did so in a way probably not expected by him. He went there as a prisoner. And yet, everywhere Paul went there were death plots, and he escaped them. Have you considered before that God could have used the prayers of the Roman believers to contribute to rescuing Paul in Jerusalem? So, they indeed had a part of Paul's ministry there.

## **Personal greetings and benediction**

Let's turn now to chapter sixteen and look at Paul's personal greetings and benediction, which will wrap up the letter. As an aside, Romans sixteen is unique firstly in that Paul mentions many individual names. And secondly, it is unique because Paul gives attention to house churches. Paul talks about the church that is in the house of Priscilla and Aquila. He talks about the household of Aristobulus and the household of Narcissus. He speaks about Olympus and the saints who were there. It appears that the house churches collectively made up the church in Rome.

Another interesting thing in this section is Paul's mention of females. In the first century world, females were not given the same status in society that is ascribed to females in our modern cultures, and yet Christianity elevated the role that women could play. And the final thing that I find unique is that Paul recognises the labour and the contribution of different individuals within the body. That is encouraging because it shows us that sometimes we may think that nobody knows or cares how we are serving the Lord, but God does know, and he does care, and that is important for us to remember.

Walk through chapter sixteen with me. Look at verses one and two, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she

herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.” Phoebe lived in Cenchrea, the eastern seaport of Corinth. Paul was in Corinth when he wrote the book of Romans, probably about nine miles away, and so it is likely that Phoebe carried the letter to the church in Rome. Then we see a reference to Priscilla and Aquila, Paul's fellow workers in the Lord. He talks about the sacrifices they had made. In other places in the New Testament we find that they had a church in their house in Ephesus. And now they have a church in their house in Rome. They were obviously very mobile in their ministry and would go where the needs were.

For the sake of time, I am not going to touch on each individual mentioned in Romans chapter sixteen, other than to point out the instances where Paul mentions the word *work*. Look at verse six, “Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you...Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker” (verse nine). Then down in verse twelve, “Tryphena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord...Perseus, the blood, who has worked hard in the Lord.” The fact that Paul mentions the labor of these individuals shows that he values their labor. Often in ministry we can get discouraged when it feels like no one appreciates our effort. Firstly, remember that we are ministering ultimately for the Lord, and that should be our motive. And secondly, when people do not seem to appreciate what we are doing, be encouraged that Christ does notice our labor.

You are likely aware that the Wright brothers were the first to fly an airplane. What you may not know is the other individuals who were a part of their adventure, and I am fairly confident that you do not know their names. Their names are Adam Etheridge, Will Dough, and John Daniels. The reason I mention them is because even though no one knows their names, they too were very much a part of the Wright brothers flight.

In the same way, there are many individuals in the body of Christ, and although we may not know their names, they are still equally a part of the work that God is doing. Paul singles out some individuals that he knows, although he probably leaves out many people that he could have mentioned. But understand this, God knows who you are, He knows your labor for the Lord and He takes note of it. Let that encourage you as you seek to serve the Lord as well.

To wrap this up, let's look at Paul's warning against malicious teachers, “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them” (Romans 16:17). Paul is not talking about teachers who may have a different opinion on some detail of Scripture. Paul is talking about malicious false teachers who have an intent to deceive. Notice his explanation, “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” These teachers focus on the gullible, the unsuspecting. And they use flattering

speech to deceive them and draw them towards their false teaching. Paul's answer to that is, "Mark those men, and stay away from those that teach contrary to what you have been taught." The idea here is that Apostolic Doctrine is the standard, and if people differ from that, mark them and stay away from them.

Paul finishes with greetings from certain of his associates. "Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater" (Romans 16:21). Tertius then says, "I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord." Tertius was Paul's scribe, and Paul allowed him to give his greeting as well. Tertius then proceeds to write more greetings from Paul's various associates.

And now we come to the benediction. This is the capstone of the book of Romans as it includes a declaration that God is able to establish believers in the faith. Look at Romans 16:25, "Now to him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever." We sense Paul's excitement that the mystery is unfolded and that the Message is now going to the nations. What God intended all the way back with Abraham (that the nations would be blessed through him) is now being fulfilled in history. We are living in God's narrative. And in this narrative, God is maturing us as believers and using us to reach out to new people. And the capstone in the book, again, is the declaration that God is able to establish believers in the faith.

I must add that when I first studied the book of Romans, I felt so discouraged because I saw how far away I was from the maturity that I should have. But we see here that God is the One who is able to establish us. He is the One who started the work in us, who justified us, and who will also glorify us. He is leading us as sons and daughters of God, by His Spirit, into maturity. As we close this book, let's be confident that God is at work in us to make us like Christ, and remember that He will be faithful to accomplish His work.

When we hear these wonderful truths of Romans, the only appropriate response is that of Paul in Romans 16:27, "To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever." In other words, we praise God for the wonderful Truths that He has given us. And then we say with Paul, "Amen, it is true." We worship God for His Truth, and we take Him at His Word. And on that note, we come to the end of our study on the book of Romans.





## DISCUSSION POINTS

### *Paul's Ministry Plans*

1. What was Paul's goal in ministry according to 15:14-21?
2. Where did he focus his missionary efforts?
3. What was the standard by which the believers' were to measure the teaching they heard?
4. Paul says that the Lord will soon crush Satan. When will that happen according to God's Narrative?
5. Who is able to establish us in the faith according to 16:25? Are you trusting Him to do this? Are you walking in such a way that would further His work in you?