



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"No Pain, No Spain"

Romans 15:22-33

I'll admit it. *Three Dog Night* was one of my favorite rock bands in my adolescent years. I still listen to *One, Celebrate, & Eli's Comin'*.

One of their lesser songs was *Never Been to Spain*. That is essentially what Paul says to the Romans in this section. He was planning to visit them on his way to Spain to pioneer a work for the Lord.

Romans 15:22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.

Paul was "hindered" from visiting Rome because, wherever he went, nonbelieving Jews opposed his ministry toward Gentiles. They simply would not admit God was extending grace to "whosoever will" believe in Him without first or subsequently adopting the Law of Moses.

Whenever you attempt to serve the Lord **you can expect to be hindered**. Writing to the Thessalonians Paul said, "we would have come to you... but Satan hindered us" (First Thessalonians 2:18).

I think sometimes we have a romantic notion that if the Lord is leading us it will be smooth sailing. Quite the opposite is often the case. That's why you need to be careful making decisions based strictly on circumstances.

- Jonah had smooth sailing at first; but he was headed in the opposite direction from where the Lord had sent him.
- The disciples were afraid in the storm while Jesus was sleeping in the boat - but they were directly in the center of God's will for them.

Romans 15:23 But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you,

“No longer having a place in these parts” meant there was no new ground to win for the Lord. There was no place to pioneer a work so he was moving on.

I mentioned this last week but it bears emphasizing. Too much church planting today is not pioneering work where churches really need to be established. It is instead men building upon other men’s work.

Romans 15:24 whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.

He hoped to stop in Rome, to see the saints he was writing in this letter. It would help him on his way to see them.

In what ways would it help him? First, he would “enjoy [their] company for a while.” The church ought to be a place where saints enjoy the company of one another.

I enjoy being a Christian. I’m not pining away for the things I used to do before I was saved. If anything I wish I had gotten saved sooner.

I’m not saying I have no struggle with the flesh; only that I recognize it is the flesh and it will lead to ruin to yield to it. What I’m trying to say is that the Christian life is better in every way; it is real, purposeful, meaningful.

Not everybody is a goof-off like me. Regardless your personality, learn to enjoy the Christian life. As we saw Sunday in our study of Jeremiah and his sash, we are to adorn the Lord in beautiful ways. If nonbelievers think of Christianity as a sacrifice, as a bummer, as a drudgery, it comes from Christians or those professing to be Christians making a mockery of the abundant life Jesus promises.

The secret is to enjoy the Lord Himself; to realize in fresh ways every day that He is your sufficiency.

There was another important way Paul could be helped on his way by the Roman church.

Romans 15:25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.

Romans 15:26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

Romans 15:27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver a financial gift to the poor saints there. The believers in Jerusalem felt the brunt of Jewish hostility and hatred towards the Gospel. Their lands, goods, and moneys had been confiscated.

The Gentiles in Macedonia and Achaia were cheerful and anxious to give. In fact, they thought of it as paying a debt of gratitude. The Gentiles, after all, were being grafted in to the promises that were once to the Jew first. With all God had done for them by grace, how could they not be generous?

Generosity is characteristic of a Christian. How can I be stingy with anything seeing all God has given me? “All I have needed, Thou hast provided.”

Romans 15:28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.

Paul spoke of your support as a reward! He said it was "fruit" to the account of those who support, and that it would be "sealed," meaning secured. The only place you can be sure something is absolutely secure is in Heaven.

As you give, **God gives you a share in the ministry you support** and you are rewarded in Heaven for it as if you were doing the work yourself.

Scholars are divided as to whether or not Paul made it to Spain. There is not enough evidence to decide, with certainty, either way. It's enough for us to see that his heart was to carry the Gospel to places it had not yet reached, establishing or visiting established churches along his way

Romans 15:29 But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

Paul was hindered and hated wherever he went. He had no place to call his home. He had spent time in prison; he was in constant danger in his travels. There are many, many other hardships we could mention. Yet he described his missionary efforts as "the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ." These hindrances and hardships convinced him that he was truly a minister of the Gospel because he was being treated just the same way that his Lord, Jesus, had been treated.

Romans 15:30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,
Romans 15:31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,
Romans 15:32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.

Paul asked for prayer in three areas. For his safety, he asked to "be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe." Paul's strategy to overcome opposition was to ask others to pray. Notice that his prayer was to be "delivered." I may be reading too much into it, but usually you only need to be delivered if you are in some danger. Paul was therefore acknowledging that trouble was his lot. Indeed, when he was first saved the Lord mentioned he would need to suffer a great many things.

Paul was committed to the Gospel regardless the hardships and his primary concern was not for his safety but for deliverance so he could keep on preaching.

For his service, he asked that it be "acceptable to the saints." In the context, he was asking that the believers in Jerusalem accept the gift he was bringing them in the love and grace with which he had collected it.

You'd think a financial gift would be "acceptable" without the need to pray about it. But Paul knew folks could be strange. There might be pride that refused to accept charity - especially from Gentiles.

On a larger scale, ministry can be from the Lord but not received well by the Lord's people. I've been involved in plenty of situations over the years where a certain way of ministering, of approaching ministry, was a cause for division in the body of Christ.

For his steps, Paul asked that he might "come to [them] by the will of God." He had his own desires that he thought were godly but always wanted to be subordinate to God's will for his life.

Paul was asking for prayer. He understood the power, the necessity, of prayer.

What I am about to say isn't meant to put a burden on anyone in particular. If it exhorts you, then it's for you; but I'm not trying to guilt anyone or shame anyone. It's simply an accurate observation. We - as a fellowship - **don't pray enough.**

You may personally pray like crazy. You may pray constantly, without ceasing, in secret as we all should. But we as a fellowship do not get together enough for prayer. And, when we do get together, very few come together to pray.

You know the story about Charles Spurgeon and prayer, right? The version I heard goes like this.

Five young college students were spending a Sunday in London, so they went to hear the famed C.H. Spurgeon preach. While waiting for the doors to open, the students were greeted by a man who asked, "Gentlemen, let me show you around. Would you like to see the heating plant of this church?" They were not particularly interested, for it was a hot day in July. But they didn't want to offend the stranger, so they consented. The young men were taken down a stairway, a door was quietly opened, and their guide whispered, "This is our heating plant." Surprised, the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, seeking a blessing on the service that was soon to begin in the auditorium above. Softly closing the door, the gentleman then introduced himself. It was none other than Charles Spurgeon.

An anonymous source said, "Prayer is the real work, evangelism is just the mopping up." S.D. Gordon said, "Prayer strikes the winning blow; service is simply picking up the pieces."

It's not just that we need to pray more. We need to *want* to pray more.

Paul ended this section with his own prayer.

Romans 15:33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

In chapter fifteen the Lord has been named the God of patience and consolation (v5), the God of hope (v13), and now the God of peace.

How many names and titles are there for God and for Jesus Christ? There are a lot! He is too wonderful to be captured fully in even all of them put together.

So why choose “the God of peace” here? A major object of the letter is to establish peace between the believing Jews and Gentiles, and to show them their mutual obligations, and the infinite mercy of God to both; and now he concludes with praying that the God of peace - He from whom it comes, and by whom it is preserved - may be for ever with them.

I want to return briefly to Paul’s desire, expressed twice, to go to Spain.

You might ask yourself, Do I have a ‘Spain’ in my spiritual planning? There are two ways you might:

- One way is to have a definite spiritual goal, something that is from the Lord but that you are working to accomplish in cooperation with Him. I know for us, after we got saved, God began to grow a desire to be in full-time pastoral ministry. We knew we would have to wait for God to direct but we also knew we would need to be ready and, so, we began to adjust our lifestyle so we would be.
- Another way to have a ‘Spain’ in your planning is to begin to approach everything you do in terms of its potential as an opportunity for ministry. How can you interject the Gospel right where you are in a new, fresh way?

Either way, let’s be on our way to ‘Spain’ on our way, ultimately, to Heaven.