



ROMANS Part 133

Chapter 15:23-29

Paul shares his itinerary with the Romans.



23 Yet now, having by no means still place in these regions, yet having for many years a longing to come to you, 24 as ever I may be going into Spain (for I am expecting, while going through, to gaze upon you, and

by you to be sent forward there, if I should ever first be filled, in part, by you)—25 yet now I am going to Jerusalem, dispensing to the saints. 26 For it delights Macedonia and Achaia to make some contribution for the poor of the saints who are in Jerusalem. 27 For they are delighted, and they are their debtors, for if the nations participate in their spiritual things, they ought to minister to them in fleshly things also. 28 When, then, performing this, and sealing to them this fruit, I shall be coming away through you into Spain. 29 Now I am aware that, in coming to you, I shall be coming with the blessing of Christ which fills.

Verses 23 and 24 are practically unreadable in the *Concordant Literal New Testament*, above. Yes, it's literal, but literal ought not mean unintelligible. Let's try this in *The Message*, Eugene Peterson's mostly questionable, sometimes despicable but occasionally helpful paraphrase. He starts here with verse 22 and goes to verse 24—

And that's why it has taken me so long to finally get around to coming to you. But now that there is no more pioneering work to be done in these parts, and since I have looked forward to seeing you for many years, I'm planning my visit. I'm headed for Spain, and expect to stop off on the way to enjoy a good visit with you, and eventually have you send me off with God's blessing.

Peterson has helped us here. But how am I supposed to comment on it? Such insipid detail hardly inspires elaboration. One has to wonder why God even deemed it necessary to include Paul's humdrum itinerary in the Scriptures. Were I to comment on the text itself, here is how it would go—

It has taken Paul awhile to finally get around to coming to the Romans, but now that he has no more pioneer-

ing work to be done in whatever parts he was in, and since he had looked forward to seeing the Romans for many years, Paul began planning his visit. He planned to head to Spain, expecting to stop off on the way to enjoy a good visit with the Romans and to eventually have the Romans send him off with God’s blessing.

Do you see? My commentary is precisely as dull as the text itself. If you, the patient reader, have managed to stay awake up until this point, I’ll tell you why I think God purified this account of Paul’s travel plans like silver in a crucible, and refined it like gold seven times (Psalm 12:6), presenting the banality to you, the modern reader, in the most precise, Godlike manner possible.

“COME ON UP”

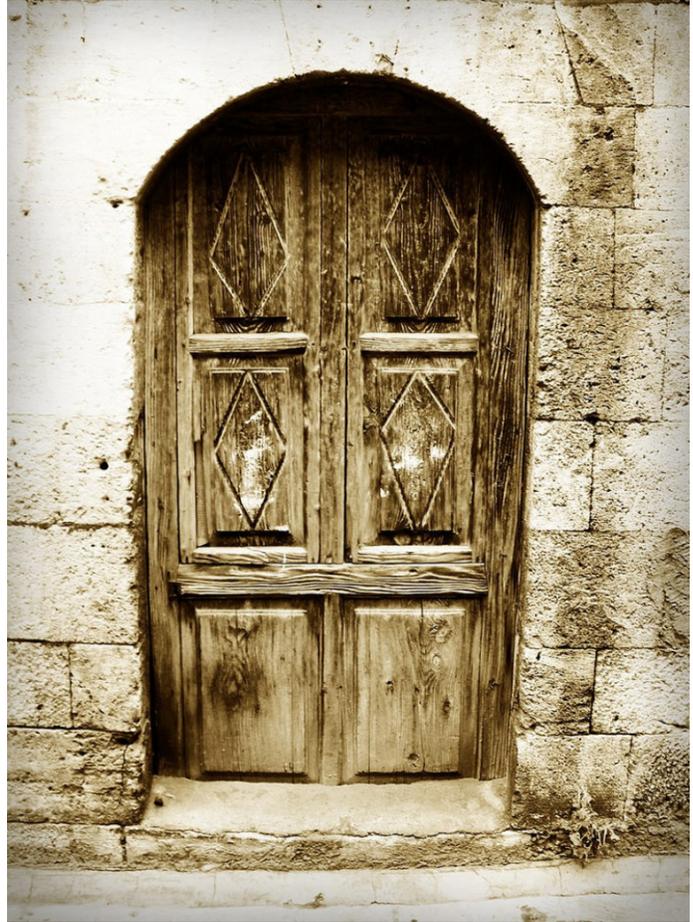
The simple truth here that deserves recording is that the great apostle was not some high and mighty administrator, ensconced in his ivory tower, enmeshed in his own literature, his heart removed from those to whom he ministered. Rather, his heart yearned to see the Romans. Along this line, he spares no ink telling them about it. They must know his feelings. They must know how much he loves them. And God must let *us* know that the possession of such pure and simple human emotions should bubble happily forth from us, no matter how proficient we are in the Scriptures, or how refined in spirit.

Paul feels a little guilty, I think, that he has not seen the Romans in so many years, and so he explains the delay. He feels that he owes them this explanation. He does not want the saints of Rome thinking ill of him, as though he has forgotten them. The delay is because of the work. “I’ve been working!” he basically says. But now that the work is completed “in these parts,” Paul intends to visit the Roman ecclesia on his way to Spain.

Of note here is the fact that Paul would visit the Romans *on the way to Spain*. Spain is the apostle’s primary objective; the gospel had not yet reached there and Paul was all about reaching open hearts with the gospel. Only secondarily might he hang with the Romans. This is nothing against the Romans, but speaks much of the Spaniards, whom he doesn’t even know. It speaks much of Paul’s dedication to his charge to bring the evangel to anyone who would listen.

A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES

“For I am expecting, while going through, to gaze upon you, and by you to be sent forward there, if I



should ever first be filled, in part, by you)—yet now I am going to Jerusalem, dispensing to the saints” (Romans 15:24-25).

Upon arrival in Rome, Paul plans to stand in whichever doorway of whichever home opens to him first (probably Priscilla’s and Aquila’s—Romans 16:3), and gather, with his eyes, every human presence. He wants to “gaze upon” the Romans. This is how starved the apostle is for fellowship. Even before greeting them with a holy kiss and a sacred high-five, he will revel in the mere materialization of other saints, appreciating how these flesh and blood believers take up space where before (before he left for Spain) there was nothing worthily tangible between himself and a blank wall.

We think of Paul as a completely spiritual person, forgetting that spirit and flesh can exist concurrently. We are not of the Gnostic disposition that matter is evil. Hugs are not evil. Kisses are not evil. Gazing upon familiar faces is the farthest thing from a villainous enterprise that I can think of. What could possibly be evil about Tryphena and Tryphosa (Romans 16:12) greeting you at the door with a holy hug and a bowl of pretzels?

Paul would then expect heartwarming fellowship, possibly spending a few nights lodging at one believer's home or another. Or several. The saints would compete, I imagine, for the honor of lodging their teacher for the night.

I remember visiting Dean Hough and Tony Nungesser in Almont, Michigan, sometime in the late '90's. Dean and Tony, laboring for the Concordant Publishing Concern, lived and worked in a home owned by Gertrude Venlet. I'm not sure who owned the home in the 1930's, but it was someone of faith. Dean told me that the bedroom I would occupy that night had been occupied by A.E. Knoch on his way to Germany from Los Angeles in 1936 (or thereabouts) to supervise the German translation of the *Concordant Literal New Testament*. Was I "too spiritual" to appreciate such a physical connection with a man whom I considered to be an apostle of Christ and hero of faith? Of course not. I see no discrepancy between the physical and the spiritual. Perhaps there are some in the body of Christ who would feel the same way about me—I don't know. After I've lodged at someone's home, people don't generally say, "Martin Zender slept here." They generally say, "Martin Zender raided this refrigerator," or, "Martin Zender ate all of our potato chips."

STRAPPED FOR IT

Paul hints at a need. He doesn't want potato chips, he needs cash. (Although, I suppose it is possible that he needs the cash *for* potato chips; one has to eat *something* on the evangelistic road between Corinth—where Paul wrote Romans—and Spain.) Anyone would need cash for such a journey. Paul subtly mentions his hope for financial sustenance with the delicate phrase, "If I should ever first be filled, in part, by you." The Romans would have gladly taken up a collection for their apostle. Who wouldn't want it on their celestial résumé that they helped the Administrator of the Gospel of God's Grace spread that gospel throughout the European continent?

Additionally, Paul wants the Roman saints aware of his intention to financially bless the needy of Jerusalem. It must be made known to them that this man gives as well as gets. If he would have the hearts of the Romans bent toward him, it is because his heart was ever bent outward, especially toward his brothers and sisters according to flesh.

THE FLESH FOR THE SPIRIT; A FAIR TRADE

"For it delights Macedonia and Achaia to make some contribution for the poor of the saints who are in

Jerusalem. For they are delighted, and they are their debtors, for if the nations participate in their spiritual things, they ought to minister to them in fleshly things also" (Romans 15:26-27).

Paul now commends to the Romans those who contributed to the needs of the Jerusalem poor. These contributed out of delight rather than compulsion, for, as Paul said in another place (2 Corinthians 9:7), "The gleeful giver is loved by God."

Concerning verse 27, I like Albert Barnes' comments in his *Notes on the New Testament*. The financial support of God's workers is always a ticklish topic (especially in this day of cash-happy charlatans), but Paul puts the matter to rest, to which Barne's aptly comments—



"It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things" (Romans 15:27).

"Their debtors"—The reason he immediately states; compare Romans 1:14.

"Of their spiritual things"—Have received the gospel by the instrumentality of those who had been Jews; and were admitted now to the same privileges with them.

"Carnal things"—Things pertaining to the flesh; that is, to this life. On this ground the apostle puts the obligation to support the ministers of the gospel; 1 Corinthians 9:11. It becomes a matter of "debt" where the hearer of the gospel "receives," in spiritual blessings, far more than he confers by supporting the ministry.

Every man who contributes his due proportion to support the gospel may receive far more, in return, in his own peace, edification, and in the order and hap-

piness of his family, than his money could purchase in any other way. The “gain” is on his side, and the money is not lost. The minister is not a beggar; and what is necessary to his support is not almsgiving. He has an equitable claim—as much as a physician, or a lawyer, or a teacher of youth has—on the necessities and comforts of life.

“HOLA, SEÑOR PAUL”

“When, then, performing this, and sealing to them this fruit, I shall be coming away through you into Spain. Now I am aware that, in coming to you, I shall be coming with the blessing of Christ which fills” (Romans 15:28-29).

After dropping off the dough in Jerusalem, Paul plans to see the Romans en route to Spain. When he gets there, he’ll have “the blessing of Christ which fills.” He’s not talking about money now, but spiritual wealth. No matter what financial sustenance Paul might or might not collect in Rome—and no matter the fiscal proceeds from Macedonia and Achaia—the apostle ever possess spiritual wealth, which fills him and subsequently gushes forth from his being. It is *this* that will warm the Roman hearts, not whatever material wealth Paul might carry upon his person.

From Corinth to Rome to Spain—here is Paul’s plan; his itinerary. We’ve no evidence that Paul ever made the trip. I am personally convicted that he did. Consider this excerpt by Dale G. Vaught from his article, “Like a Flickering Flame.” After detailing four other reasons why Paul probably did evangelize Spain, namely, 1) timing; there was a gap in Paul’s schedule from 63 AD to 67, 2) the organization and size of a Spanish ecclesia by the third century, 3) *Paul’s modus operandi*; the man rarely strategized without realizing his intended projects, and 4) the testimony of early documents, such as the letter written by Clement of Rome to the church in Corinth in 69 A.D., Vaught writes—

Finally, there are the local traditions. Although these are of late origin, they give an idea of what people much closer to the time believed. In Tarragona (Barcelona) there is a monument to Paul, and the tradition that he preached there. Also, at the other extreme of Spain in the village of Ecija (Seville) there is a monument marking the place where Paul supposedly preached.

Paul is still the Patron Saint of Ecija and for years baptisms were done in the name of the Father, the Son

and the Apostle Paul. One plausible route for Paul’s visit would be to enter Spain at Tarragona (Tarraco), passing down the coast to Cadiz and then back through Sevilla, Ecija, Cordoba, Mérida, Zaragoza and leaving again from the port of Ampuias (Emporias) on the coast between Barcelona and the French border. It should be remembered that travel between Spain and Italy was a common occurrence and what happened in one country did not escape the notice of the other.

The evidence is strongly in favor of Paul having visited Spain. However that alone would not have been sufficient to evangelize Spain to the extent we see at such



an early date. There had to have been others that did the bulk of the work. Who these were makes for interesting conjectures. Spain was very closely linked to Rome and maybe some of the converted Praetorium guards that were with Paul in Rome were sent to Spain, where they testified to others.

I would simply say that, what Paul set out to do, he generally did—

—except for that one particular intention, years before, to arrest the Christians of Damascus. He got a little side-tracked there. But other than *that...* —MZ