

Romans 15:14-33

“Nothing I asked for; but everything I hoped for” (part b)

I. Intro

II. Vs. 17-33 Paul’s ministry

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We conclude Roman’s 15 with the 2nd half of these verses where Paul uses himself as the example to follow as he refers to his own ministry. He tells them in essence, *“I got nothing I asked for but everything I wanted!* Looking at Paul’s life and ministry reminds me of a more modern example in David Livingstone when he applied to the London Missionary Society they asked him where he would like to go and he replied *“Anywhere, as long as it is forward!”* Oh if we all could have such a heart!

II. Vs. 17-33 Paul’s ministry

Vs. 17-20 In the Spirit of a *“leader to follow”* Paul now moves to the 2nd part of this chapter which was his own ministry, and he starts out with **four examples they could apply.**

1. Vs. 17 **The first has to do with how he viewed success:** Paul didn’t attach numbers or events as the keys to determine if he was being successful. Instead he looked to the bases of **Who got the glory!** How much better the church would be if all adapted Paul’s view of success and stop **the world’s definition of success based upon popularity.** What matters is not what man thinks of my performance, what matters is what God thinks of my performance and **if I’m doing what He has called me to do in His power for His glory He has declared it a success and of value.** But if not; even if men praise it, sell books, and gather from the four corners of the earth to marvel at **my work,** it is an utter failure! To help us in our new definition of success Paul lists **three things that kept him defining it that way:**

- a. Vs. 18 **Paul only remembered what God had done**: He kept the perspective that we are only instruments in the hand of the Master and can't play a tune apart from Him playing masterfully through us. A day doesn't go by that I don't receive some flyer inviting me to go to some seminar with a lineup of Christian "*superstars*" that will be performing! We Christians seem to be very impressed with the instrument that God uses and not very impressed with the Master who can pick up any instrument and play perfectly not because of the quality of the instrument but rather because of the skill of the Master! Paul would have never allowed such a bio to be placed as a basis of enticing believers to come and hear him speak. When questioned by the Church in Corinth, asked for letters of recommendations he simply said that they were his letters! God doesn't need my brilliant mind, dashing good looks, and eloquent oratory skills; thank God because as you have noticed I don't possess any of these qualities. What He wants is my availability and brokenness and He uses me in spite of me! Dear ones **there is no limit to what God can do through any person who is willing to allow God to get all the glory for the work only He can do through them!**
- b. Vs. 19a **Paul was reminded that any and all work that was accomplished was because of the Power of the Holy Spirit**: The 2nd thing Paul could point to was that **what He did was all powered by God!** Too many folks in the Church today view the Holy Spirit as the horn on a locomotive, "*It's just there to toot, make some commotion; bring in some excitement, clear the tracks!*" But the Holy Spirit isn't for "*commotion*" He's there for "*locomotion!*" The only correct way to speak to an instrument that moves you is to say, "*Man the Master sure made you sound good!*" There is a power from the Spirit of God that is unmistakable that at times people try

to mimic with emotionalism or shouting and all kinds of theatrics, but these aren't the hallmarks of the Spirit's power transformation is!

- c. Vs. 19b-21 **Paul was reminded that success was not an isolated event:** In the geographical list of "*from Jerusalem to Illyricum*" (further clarified in verse 26 *where Paul also traveled and received an offering for the suffering believers in Jerusalem listing Macedonia and Achaia*): Is Israel, Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia; well over 1,400 miles radius with varied cultures and traditions yet the gospel worked each and every time. In other words **the gospel wasn't limited to one culture through one servant which was a testimony not of Paul but of the power of the gospel to change lives. He saw his calling not to fish in other people's aquariums but instead to go out to the untapped oceans of humanity where he could truly be a fisher of men.** It was for this reason that he continued his practice to go to where no man has gone before. Paul knew that the power lay not with the messenger but with the Holy Spirit, as the scriptures testified.

Right here in these two verses I believe that we can see two reasons why the westernized church doesn't resemble the early church found in our Bibles:

- A. The church today relies upon human power and ingenuity to accomplish what only the Holy Spirit can produce; changed lives. Often when the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the Church He is viewed as a whistle not the engine that He is.
- B. Second, the Church has spent most of its energy and resources fishing in aquariums where the fish are already caught and they are just releasing them into their own tanks, only to be caught by other fishermen to be released into their aquarium.

2. Vs. 22-24 The 2nd thing Paul could point to in a leader to follow is seen on **how Paul planned**. Based upon the text **four things** they could glean:
- a. The first thing to note in this section is that **Paul was a planner**: Paul had plans to go to them in Rome; from there he had plans to go to Spain. There are those who think that making plans is somehow diminishing the work of the Holy Spirit to guide us, but God is a God of order I believe that if you plan for nothing you will always accomplish your plan!
 - b. The 2nd thing I note is that in his plans **Paul remained flexible**: He longed to go to Rome and then Spain, but he had been much hindered in doing so the timing had to change and then later the way in which God would accomplish this would change. Christian planning is never about telling God what to do or when to do it, instead it is about letting your heart be directed by the Holy Spirit and trusting that He will work out what He has spoken.
 - c. The 3rd thing I see is that **Paul remained persistent**: Having to adjust to the timing and the way Paul didn't give up on what he believed the Lord had spoken to him with regards to going to Rome and then Spain. I'm afraid that far too many times we believers give up on God's direction when He doesn't follow our script. His ways aren't our ways but that doesn't mean that we should fold up and not follow what He has spoken to us!
 - d. The final thing I notice with regards to God's direction is that **Paul saw this as a team effort not an individual one**: He hoped to see them but involved others in achieving the plan when it took place. There are far too many of us that see ourselves as the "Lone Ranger" but remember that even the "Lone Ranger" wasn't alone as he

had Tonto and Silver! Paul was purposefully dependent upon others to accomplish the plans that the Lord had set before him. Why Spain?

1. First Spain was at the very Western end of Europe, the limit of the known civilized world and Paul wished to take the gospel as far as he could take it to the ends of the earth!
2. Second, Spain was going through an intellectual revolution at the time as the greatest thinkers were Spaniards and as such perhaps Paul wanted to have an opportunity to touch not only his generations but future generations by reaching Spain.
3. Vs. 25-29 The third aspect of Paul's ministry that they could adopt has to do with **faithfulness in keeping his promises**. Even though Paul future was somewhat uncertain he still planned but even more important than the plan for the future was the **faithfulness to finish what he had started in the past**. Promises were made and ill regardless of what he faced he was going to finish what he started, and he encouraged the others to adopt this same principal in ministry. Not knowing what God has for you in the future never negates what He has for you to do in the present! Far too many Christian's never finish the things they have started but are very eager to go to the next exciting thing. In the 27th verse Paul take time to instruct these Roman believers in the principals of giving that: *"If you have been blessed with spiritual things then one way to thank a church or a ministry is to make sure they can continue to do so for other and contribute financially to further them down the road to bless someone else."* Notice that Paul says in verse 28 that going on to Rome than Spain was only after he had finished the task of collecting the offering for the famine relief in Jerusalem.

4. Vs. 30-33 The final part of this chapter is Paul requesting that they pray for him, and this leads us to the final example of his ministry they could apply. **Paul trusted in and relied upon the power of God to accomplish the purpose and plans of God.** Though God may very well prompt people to participate with Paul, his trust was not upon people to join him but upon God to empower Him! One way every Christian can and should participate in ministry is to under gird God's servants in prayer and Paul expected and asked for such prayers to be made upon his behalf. Prayer is born of the Spirit of God, awakened by a desire to help and a sense of love and compassion. Paul says, "*Join me in the battle by praying for me as I fight the good fight!*" Notice here that **three things about Paul's request for prayer:**

- a. Vs. 31a It was for protection from unbelievers: According to Acts 21 he was beaten so badly that they were using him as the rope in a game of tug of war. Had it not been for the Roman guard that took him into protective custody they would have killed him. Have you ever prayed something and having done so experienced the opposite of what you had prayed for? Well Paul could relate but it doesn't mean that God didn't hear him; it meant that God had a plan that differed from Paul's.
- b. Vs. 31b It was for acceptance from believers: This doesn't appear to be the situation either as he brought the offering from the gentiles but never seemed to thank him. And during the next two years while according to 2 Tim. 4:16-17 while in protective custody, "*no one stood with me, but all forsook me.*"
- c. Vs. 32-33 He expected to see results: This happen but not the way he thought it would as he went in chains as a prisoner. The purpose and power of prayer isn't about us getting what we think is best from God it is about God getting His best out of us!

Let us cease chiding people for failing to bring folks to hear the gospel, instead let us encourage each other to obey the Lord and bring the gospel to the world!