SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES

†
15:13

DEEP DIVE

# Romans

## *Chapter Fifteen, Verses 1–33*

*The God of Hope and the Road to Spain — Strong Shoulders, One Voice, a Priest of the Gospel, and a Plan Bigger Than Paul's*

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

The strong are told to carry the weak because Christ did not please Himself; four Old Testament voices call the Gentiles to praise; and the apostle opens his travel plans — Jerusalem with an offering, then Rome, then Spain — and asks a church he has never met to wrestle with him in prayer. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Paul's key words.

THE PASSAGE

**Romans 15:1–33**

*bear · accept · minister · go*

THE METHOD

**Verse by Verse**

*Color-coded by teacher*

WHAT'S INSIDE

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*Strong shoulders, one voice, a priest of the gospel, and the road west*


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*"Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." — Romans 15:7*

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

# Romans 15:1–33

*The God of Hope and the Road to Spain — the strong bear the weak, the Gentiles sing, and Paul lays out his road from Corinth to Jerusalem, Rome and Spain*

## † How to Read This Study

This study walks Romans 15 in 4 movements, in Paul's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the argument so you can see where Paul is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word
R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle
MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED
God — His character & actions
Command / instruction
Key repeated word
Sin / warning
Promise / blessing
Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · ROMANS 15:13

"Now may △the God of hope fill you with ☆all joy and peace in believing, so that you will ☆abound in hope by △the power of the Holy Spirit."

## † Before the Passage

Romans 15 finishes two things at once. Its first thirteen verses close the long section on the strong and the weak that began at 14:1 — "Now accept the one who is weak in faith" — and its last twenty verses open the letter's farewell, where Paul turns from doctrine to travel plans. The hinge is verse 7: "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us." Behind the quarrel over meat and holy days stands the question the whole letter has been answering since 1:16 — the gospel is "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." In 15:8–12 Paul gathers that thread and ties it off: Christ served Israel to keep God's promises, and He did it so that the nations would praise God for His mercy.

The background is a real journey. Paul is almost certainly writing from Corinth, during the three months he spent in Greece on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2–3), around AD 57; Phoebe of nearby Cenchrea carries the letter (16:1), and Gaius is his host (16:23). He has just finished collecting money from the Gentile

churches of Macedonia and Achaia for the poor believers in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8–9; Galatians 2:10). He means to deliver it, then come to Rome, then go on to Spain. The opening of the letter told the Romans he had "often" planned to come and had "been prevented so far" (1:13); verse 22 picks up the same word, "prevented," and now explains it.

The Old Testament roots run deep. Christ's refusal to please Himself is read through Psalm 69, the psalm of the righteous sufferer. The praise of the Gentiles is proved from all three parts of the Hebrew Bible — the Writings (Psalm 18:49, also found in 2 Samuel 22:50, and Psalm 117:1), the Law (Deuteronomy 32:43) and the Prophets (Isaiah 11:10). Paul's pioneer mission is Isaiah 52:15, from the Servant song that runs into Isaiah 53. Even his title for God changes as the chapter moves: the God who gives perseverance and encouragement (v. 5), the God of hope (v. 13), the God of peace (v. 33).

Read the chapter as a widening circle. It starts with one weak brother at one table (vv. 1–6), widens to Jew and Gentile in one church (vv. 7–13), widens again to an apostle's whole field "from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum" (vv. 14–21), and finally to the far west — Spain — and the prayers of a church Paul has never visited (vv. 22–33). The same Christ who did not please Himself at the table is the Christ who sends His gospel to the end of the map.

FIGURE · THREE NAMES FOR GOD IN ONE CHAPTER




*Each movement ends in a prayer that names God by what the church needs: perseverance and encouragement for the quarrel at the table, hope for Jew and Gentile together, peace for an apostle walking into danger.*

I
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 15:1–6

## The Strong Bear the Weak

*Christ did not please Himself — the Scriptures give hope — one accord, one voice*

> [1] *Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.* [2] *Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.* [3] *For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME."* [4] *For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the*

> *encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* [5] *Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,* [6] *so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> ROMANS 15:1–6

> *"For zeal for Your house has consumed me, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."*
>
> PSALM 69:9

## βαστάζειν

BASTAZEIN · "TO BEAR, CARRY" · G941

*Bastazō* is a load-carrying verb: to lift and carry, and figuratively to endure. It is the verb of John 19:17, where Jesus goes out carrying His own cross, and of Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens." Matthew uses it for Christ bearing our diseases (8:17). So the strong are not asked merely to put up with the weak but to put them on their shoulders. What they carry are *asthenēmata* (G771), "weaknesses," a word found only here in the New Testament, belonging to the *adynatoi* (G102), literally "the powerless." The opposite of bearing is *areskein heautois* (G700), "to please ourselves" — and verse 3 answers it at once: Christ *ouch heautō ēresen*, "did not please Himself."

## ὑπομονή · παράκλησις

HYPOMONĒ · PARAKLĒSIS · "PERSEVERANCE · ENCOURAGEMENT" · G5281 · G3874

The same two nouns appear in verse 4 and verse 5. In verse 4 they come "of the Scriptures"; in verse 5 they come from "the God who gives perseverance and encouragement" (KJV, "the God of patience and consolation"). *Hypomonē* is remaining under a load without breaking; *paraklēsis* is the word of one called alongside to strengthen — the family of *paraklētos*, the Helper of John 14. Their goal is *elpis* (G1680), hope. The Bible is the channel; God is the source.

## ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν ἑνὶ στόματι

HOMOTHYMADON EN HENI STOMATI · "WITH ONE ACCORD … WITH ONE VOICE" · G3661

*Homothymadon*, "with one passion," occurs eleven times in the New Testament, and ten are in Acts — the church praying in the upper room (1:14) and lifting its voice together (4:24), but also the mob that rushed at Stephen (7:57) and the crowd that stormed the theater at Ephesus (19:29). Romans 15:6 is its only use outside Acts. A crowd can be of one mind for murder; Paul asks God to make the church of one mind for worship, "with one mouth" (*stoma*), so that its single voice glorifies "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

**DAVID GUZIK** · Enduring Word

Guzik notices that the idea "isn't really bearing *with*, but bearing *up* the weaker brother." The strong are to support the weak, and the goal is to make them strong — not to let the weakest conscience set the agenda for the whole church. Pleasing a neighbor for his good is not flattery: "Paul does not mean being a 'man-pleaser.'" Then he holds up the model: "Jesus is the ultimate example of one who did not please Himself," bearing the reproach of Psalm 69 — while we are quick to defend ourselves when God is able to vindicate us. And he reads verse 5's prayer as proof that unity is God's work, from a God patient with His people and His plan: "God's delays are not His denials, and He has a loving purpose in every delay."

**R.C. SPROUL** · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

In "Bearing Others' Burdens" (Romans 14:19–15:13, preached June 3, 2007) Sproul sets verse 2 beside Galatians 1:10. Man-pleasing that compromises the gospel is a vice; pleasing a neighbor for his good and edification is a virtue — and the harder one: "It is so much easier to destroy your brother than it is to edify your brother." He reads Psalm 69 as messianic: "Zeal for My Father's house has consumed Me," and "the reproaches that were directed against God came upon Him." Christ never lived for His own pleasure: "Rather than pleasing Himself, His meat and drink was to please the Father." On verse 4 he is simple and personal — "I know of nothing more comforting to the soul than the Word of God" — and he contrasts the Spirit's conviction, which leads to hope, with Satan's accusation, which leaves none.

**C.H. SPURGEON** · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's exposition of the passage asks the strong to give up liberties that would grieve a weaker brother, because Christ took the hardest place: "he exposed himself to the fiercest part of all the conflict." On pleasing a neighbor "to edification" he tells of Handel, praised for entertaining his hearers: "I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wish to make them better." His verdict on idle talk: "If we have nothing to speak to edification, how much better to hold our tongue!" And on verse 4, the text old Hugh Latimer loved to preach, he insists that "The Old Testament is not outworn; apostles learned from it," for "The Holy Scriptures produce and ripen the noblest graces" — patience, comfort and hope.

**MATTHEW HENRY** · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry is tender toward the weak: "We must consider these; not trample upon them, but encourage them, and bear with their infirmities" — "Alas! it is their weakness, they cannot help it." His great line is on verse 3: "The self-denial of our Lord Jesus is the best argument against the selfishness of Christians," for "His whole life was a self-denying self-displeasing life." On the Scriptures he says, "Those are the most learned that are most mighty in the scriptures," and warns that there is "nothing more destructive to hope than impatience." Verse 5 shows where the help comes from: God is "the author and the foundation of all the patience and consolation of the saints" — it comes "through the scripture as the conduit-pipe, but from God as the fountain-head."

II
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 15:7–13

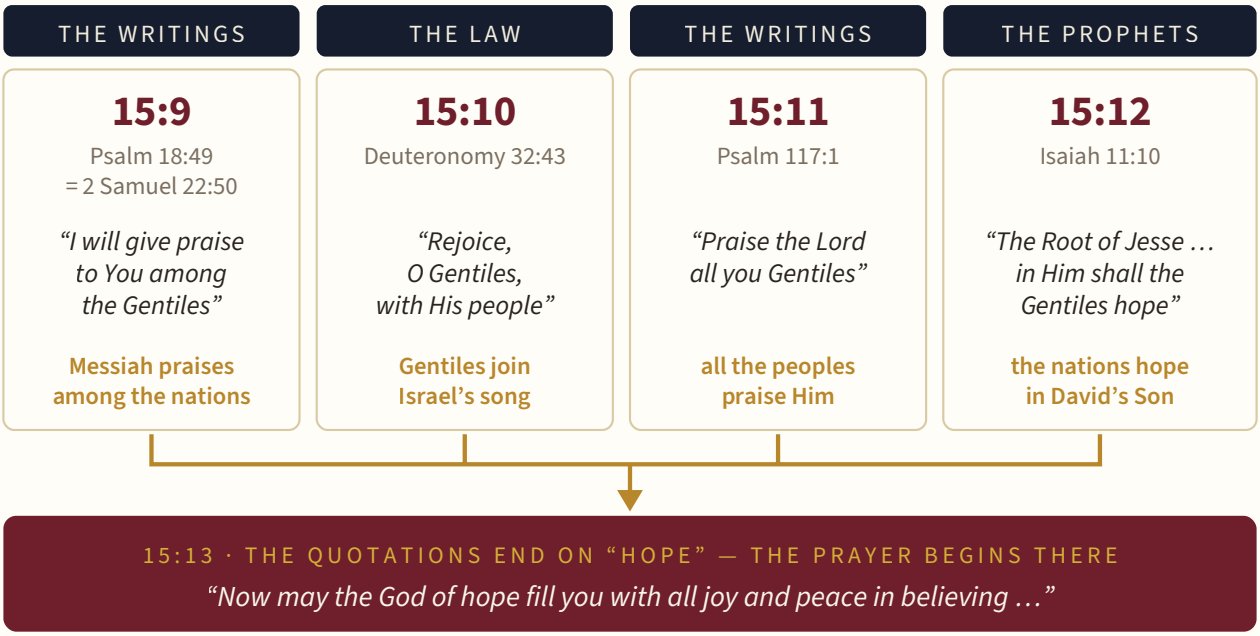
## Accept One Another — the Gentiles Sing

*Christ the servant of Israel, four Old Testament voices, and the God of hope*

7 *Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.* 8 *For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers,* 9 *and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."* 10 *Again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE."* 11 *And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM."* 12 *Again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE."* 13 *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

ROMANS 15:7–13

FIGURE · FOUR WITNESSES: THE GENTILES PRAISE GOD (15:9–12)




*Paul calls witnesses from every part of the Hebrew Bible — the Writings, the Law, the Writings again, the Prophets — and the chain ends on the word "hope," which verse 13 turns into a prayer.*

## προσλαμβάνεσθε

PROSLAMBANESTHE · "ACCEPT, WELCOME" · G4355

*Proslambanō* is to take someone to oneself — into your home, your company, your friendship. Paul has used it three times already in this section: "accept the one who is weak in faith" (14:1), "God has accepted him" (14:3), and now twice in one verse, a command and its ground: *proslambanesthe allēlous*, "accept one another," *kathōs kai ho Christos proselabeto hymas*, "just as Christ also accepted us." (SBLGNT and NA28 read *hymas*, "you"; NASB95 follows manuscripts that read "us.") The standard of welcome is not the other man's opinions; it is the welcome Christ gave you.

## διάκονον … περιτομῆς … βεβαιῶσαι

DIAKONON PERITOMĒS · BEBAIŌSAI · "SERVANT TO THE CIRCUMCISION … TO CONFIRM" · G1249 · G4061 · G950

*Diakonos* (G1249) is a table-servant, the word behind "deacon"; Christ "has become" (perfect tense, *gegenēsthai*) a servant of *peritomē* (G4061), the circumcised people, Israel. Why? *Hyper alētheias theou*, "on behalf of the truth of God" — to show that God tells the truth — and *eis to bebaiōsai* (G950), to make firm, to ratify like a signed contract, the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Verse 9 then adds the second purpose: that the Gentiles would glorify God "for His mercy." Israel receives God's faithfulness; the nations receive God's mercy; both end in praise.

## ἡ ῥίζα τοῦ Ἰεσσαί … ἐλπιοῦσιν · ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἐλπίδος

HĒ RHIZA TOU IESSAI · ELPIOUSIN · HO THEOS TĒS ELPIDOS · "THE ROOT OF JESSE … WILL HOPE · THE GOD OF HOPE" · G4491 · G1680

Paul quotes Isaiah 11:10 from the Greek Old Testament, which reads "in Him the nations will hope" where the Hebrew has "the nations will resort to" Him. *Rhiza* (G4491), root, is the Messiah from David's family — the stump of Jesse that sprouts again (Isaiah 11:1), and in Revelation 5:5 and 22:16 the risen Christ's own title. The last word of the quotation is *elpiousin*, "they will hope" — and the very next verse begins *ho de theos tēs elpidos*, "now the God of hope." The quotations end on hope, and the prayer picks hope up and asks God to make it overflow: *perisseuein*, to abound, "by the power of the Holy Spirit."

**DAVID GUZIK** · Enduring Word

Guzik makes verse 7 the rule of church life: we receive one another as Christ received us, "in the terms of pure grace, knowing yet bearing with our faults," and we stop dividing over disputable matters. He reads the four quotations as God's long-declared intention that the Gentiles would praise Him — so Jew and Gentile already stand on common ground in worship. The first, from Psalm 18, he takes as a messianic picture that "describes Jesus Himself giving praise among the Gentiles." And the benediction of verse 13 is what makes the whole demand possible: "As God fills us with the blessings of His joy and peace in believing," the welcome that is hard by nature becomes the fruit of the Spirit.

**R.C. SPROUL** · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul's point on verse 7 is that acceptance is worship. "When I receive you, I am not just being kind to you. … I am glorifying God. I am glorifying Jesus." With verse 8, he says, Paul "brings it back to the question he has dealt with throughout the epistle" — the place of the Gentiles in the covenant promised to Israel. Christ's ministry to the Jews confirmed God's word to the fathers, and the Gentiles' salvation does not cancel that word but proves it: "I confirm the truth that God said to the Jew when I pour out mercy and grace to the gentiles to the glory of God." The quotations join both peoples in one voice, and the God of hope fills it: "That is what the God of all hope does when He fills us with His love in the power of the Holy Spirit."

**C.H. SPURGEON** · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's exposition keeps the order straight: "Christ did not receive us because we were perfect," so we may not wait for others to be perfect; and Christ came first to Israel — "Let us never forget that he came to those whom we are apt to forget." The Old Testament held "plain indications" that the blessing was meant for the Gentiles, yet "it was made known to the Jews first." Verse 13 he called "one of the richest passages in the Word of God" ("A Round of Delights," 1877): "Peace is joy resting, and joy is peace dancing," and "Grace enjoyed is a pledge of glory." In "Joy and Peace in Believing" he warns that feelings are not the foundation: "It is not his sense of safety that makes him safe."

**MATTHEW HENRY** · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry presses verse 7 with a question: "Has Christ been so kind to us, and shall we be so unkind to those that are his?" — for "he has received us (though we were strangers and enemies, and had played the prodigal)." On verse 8 he notes that Christ "was himself circumcised and made under the law, and did in his own person preach the gospel to the Jews"; "Christ's personal ministry was appropriated to them." The Gentiles' calling stood in "many prophesies," and by sending the Jewish believers back to their own Scriptures Paul "labours to qualify their dislike of the Gentiles." On verse 13: God "is the foundation on which our hope is built," and "true substantial joy is the fruit of faith."

III
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 15:14–21

## A Priest of the Gospel

*Written boldly to a good church — the offering of the Gentiles — from Jerusalem to Illyricum*

14 *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.* 15 *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,* 16 *to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.* 17 *Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.* 18 *For 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,* 19 *in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.* 20 *And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation;* 21 *but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."*

ROMANS 15:14–21

*"Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand."*

ISAIAH 52:15

### λειτουργὸν … ἱερουργοῦντα … ἡ προσφορά

LEITOURGON · HIEROURGOUNTA · HĒ PROSPHORA · "MINISTER … MINISTERING AS A PRIEST … OFFERING" · G3011 · G2418 · G4376

Verse 16 is built from temple words. *Leitourgos* (G3011) is a public servant in sacred service — used of rulers as God's servants (13:6) and of Christ Himself, "a minister in the sanctuary" (Hebrews 8:2). *Hierourgeō* (G2418), from *hieron*, temple, and *ergon*, work, means to perform sacred rites; it occurs only here in the New Testament. And *prosphora* (G4376) is the offering laid on the altar. But the altar is the gospel, the priest is a preacher, and the offering is people: the converted Gentiles, presented to God, "sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Paul has already said the believer's own body is "a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God" (12:1); here the evangelist brings the whole Gentile world to the same altar.

## πεπληρωκέναι … μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ

PEPLĒRŌKENAI · MECHRI TOU ILLYRIKOU · “FULLY PREACHED … AS FAR AS ILLYRICUM” · G4137 · G2437

*Plēroō* (G4137) is to fill or fulfill: literally Paul says he has “fulfilled the gospel of Christ” across the arc from Jerusalem around to Illyricum. He does not mean he spoke to every person, but that the gospel is planted and the churches can carry it on — hence “no further place for me in these regions” (v. 23). *Illyrikon* (G2437), named only here in the New Testament, was the Roman province along the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, northwest of Macedonia — roughly the coast of modern Albania, Montenegro and Croatia. Acts does not record Paul there; he may have reached its border on the Egnatian Way while passing through Macedonia (Acts 20:1–2).

## φιλοτιμούμενον

PHILOTIMOUMENON · “ASPIRING, MAKING IT MY AMBITION” · G5389

*Philotimeomai* joins *philos*, love, and *timē*, honor: literally “to love honor,” and so to make something one’s ambition. It appears three times in the New Testament, all in Paul: here, of preaching where Christ was not named; 2 Corinthians 5:9, of the ambition to please the Lord; and 1 Thessalonians 4:11, of the ambition to lead a quiet life. Paul has a holy ambition — not to build “on another man’s foundation” (*themelion*, G2310), but to lay foundations where none exist.

**DAVID GUZIK** · Enduring Word

Guzik hears verse 14 as encouragement, not suspicion: Paul is not doubting the Romans but reminding them of what they already know. Then he stops at verse 16: “Romans 15:16 is filled with the language of priesthood,” and the Gentile converts are Paul’s offering, “an acceptable sacrifice to God.” His boast is narrow on purpose — “Paul will glory only in what Christ has done through him,” by word, deed, signs and the Spirit’s power — and Guzik notices the Trinity in it: “Paul can’t talk about God without recognizing His three Persons.” On the map he is plain: “Illyricum is modern Yugoslavia and Albania.” And he guards against a wrong lesson from verse 20: Paul preferred the frontier, “not because it was wrong or bad to continue the work begun through another man,” but because the frontier needed workers.

**R.C. SPROUL** · Ligonier · St. Andrew’s

In “From Jerusalem to Illyricum” (June 10, 2007) Sproul hears verse 14 as a gentle apology: the Romans already know justification and election; Paul is refreshing their memory. His boldness rests on grace, not merit — “What Paul earned was the title that he later gave himself: the chief of sinners.” “The gospel of God” means “the gospel is God’s possession.” He takes care with the priestly words: the New Testament avoids “priest” for church officers because Christ’s sacrifice is finished — “We are not priests in the Old Testament or Roman Catholic sense” — and the offering is Paul presenting his converts. His boast is accuracy, “not just being humble”; the power is “in the Word, not in programs, human skills, or oratory.” The signs and wonders, he argues, authenticated the apostles as agents of revelation, as they did Moses.

**C.H. SPURGEON** · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's exposition seizes on what verse 16 does not say. Here, if anywhere, Paul could have described himself as a sacrificing priest offering a sacrifice like the Mass — and "he says nothing of the sort." The only offering is the Gentiles themselves, made acceptable because they are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The power behind verses 18–19 is the theme of his early sermon "The Power of the Holy Ghost" (No. 30, 1855), preached on the last words of verse 13: the Spirit attested the apostles with miracles, but His greater work is inward — "The Spirit alone has power over man's heart," and "The Holy Spirit has power over the will." That is why the sinner may take courage: "Chief of sinners, there is hope for thee!"

**MATTHEW HENRY** · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry sees the old priestly calling of Israel widened to the nations: "Long had the Jews been the holy nation, the kingdom of priests, but now the Gentiles are made priests unto God." Their conversion is the true sacrifice — "A sanctified soul is offered up to God in the flames of love, upon Christ the altar." Paul's boast is only in Christ Jesus and in what Christ wrought through him, and his labor was pioneer labor. That is why it was harder: "Paul broke the ice, and therefore must needs meet with the more difficulties and discouragements in his work." A man who lays foundations does his work where no one has yet cleared the ground.

IV
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 15:22–33

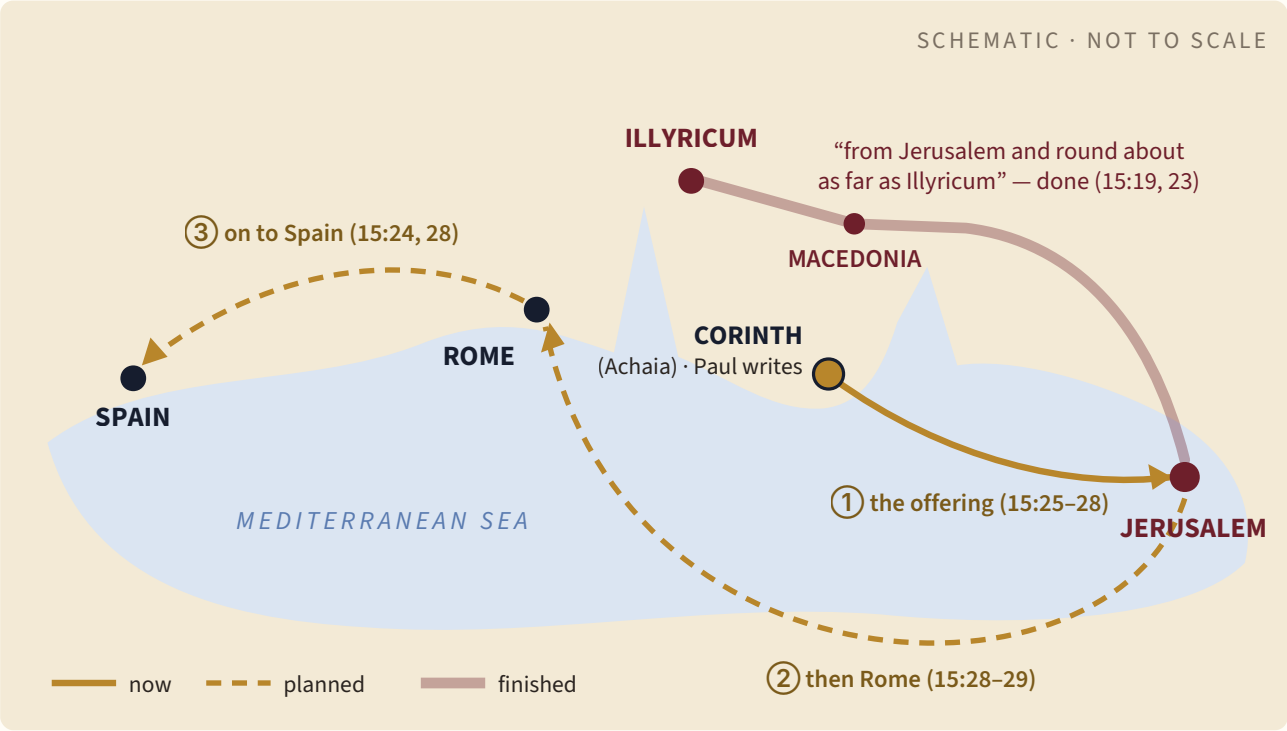
## Jerusalem, Then Rome, Then Spain

*A delayed visit, a Gentile offering for Jewish saints, a plea for prayer, and the God of peace*

*22 For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; 23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you 24 whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while— 25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, 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. 28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. 30 Now 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, 31 that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; 32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. 33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

ROMANS 15:22–33

FIGURE · PAUL'S ROAD WEST — SCHEMATIC MAP (15:19–29)




*Read the solid line first: from Corinth Paul goes east to Jerusalem with the offering; only then the dashed road to Rome and Spain. The shaded arc is the work he calls finished. In the event he reached Rome in chains (Acts 21–28).*

## κοινωνίαν τινὰ … λειτουργῆσαι

KOINŌNIAN TINA · LEITOURGĒSAI · "A CONTRIBUTION … TO MINISTER" · G2842 · G3008

The money is called *koinōnia* (G2842) — the word for fellowship, sharing, partnership. A gift is fellowship you can count. And the Gentiles are "indebted" (*opheiletai*, debtors) to "minister" to the Jerusalem saints in material things — *leitourgēsai* (G3008), the verb form of the *leitourgos* of verse 16. Paul ministered the gospel to the Gentiles as a priest; the Gentiles minister bread to Jerusalem in the same sacred service. The logic is the olive tree of chapter 11: they share "in their spiritual things," so they owe a return "in material things" (*sarkikois*, fleshly, bodily).

## σφραγισάμενος … τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτον

SPHRAGISAMENOS TON KARPON TOUTON · "HAVE PUT MY SEAL ON THIS FRUIT" · G4972

*Sphragizō* is to seal with a signet — to secure, to authenticate. Thayer calls the phrase "somewhat unusual"; it probably means that Paul will hand the collection over in person and certify it as the Gentile churches' gift, finished and accounted for. Paul handled other people's money carefully (2 Corinthians 8:20–21). The gift is "fruit" (*karpos*) — the harvest of the gospel among the Gentiles coming home to the root.

## συναγωνίσασθαί μοι

SYNAGŌNISASTHAI MOI · "TO STRIVE TOGETHER WITH ME" · G4865

Found only here in the New Testament. *Syn*, with, and *agōnizomai*, to contend in the games or the battle — the root of our "agony." Luke uses the related noun *agōnia* of Jesus in Gethsemane (22:44). Paul does not ask the Romans to remember him in a passing word; he asks them to get into the fight beside him, "by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit." The prayer has three specific requests — rescue from the disobedient in Judea, acceptance of the gift by the saints, and a joyful arrival in Rome "by the will of God." Acts 21–28 shows how each was answered.

**DAVID GUZIK** · Enduring Word

Guzik explains the delay: pioneer work in the east had kept Paul from Rome, and Rome was meant to become a base for the western mission as Antioch had been for the east. Paul planned to carry the Macedonian and Achaian gift first, because the Gentiles owed material help to the believers who gave them spiritual blessing. Then the irony: "Paul would indeed head for Rome after his time in Jerusalem, but not in the way he planned!" He believes "we have reason to believe that Paul did in fact make it to Spain." On verse 30 he links "strive together" to Gethsemane and draws a pastoral line: "Ministers need the prayers of their flocks." Were the prayers answered? "The prayers of Paul and the Romans were answered, though not in the manner they expected" — "he did come to them with joy – though also in chains!"

**R.C. SPROUL** · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul keeps to what is known: "Whether Paul ever got to Spain, we do not know." What we do know is that "he got to Rome, but he did not get to Rome because it was on the way to Spain" — he came in chains, after the conflicts of Acts. The collection matters to him theologically: "The gentiles understood that they were the wild olive branch that was grafted into the root of Israel," and so they counted themselves debtors. He hears real fear in verse 31; Paul knew what waited for him in Judea — "He knows there is a bullseye on his back." And he closes on the benediction of verse 33, "the God of peace," reading it through the Hebrew *shalom* and the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24–26.

**C.H. SPURGEON** · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In "Pleading for Prayer" Spurgeon hears in "strive together" a call to "agonise," like Gethsemane, and he turns Paul's appeal into a debt the church can pay: "As you cannot repay what you owe to Christ personally, repay it to His servant by your prayers." He likes the precision of Paul's three requests, and notes that the first two were granted and the third came differently, through a prison. His counsel: "pray for a blessing, and leave the way of its coming to the good Lord who knoweth all things." His exposition adds that Paul was sure of coming in the full blessing of Christ, though "he did not know how he would go in other respects." And the benediction of verse 33 rests on God's own nature: "Peace is His delight"; "God is the great Peacemaker."

**MATTHEW HENRY** · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry is cautious about Spain: "it is not certain whether ever he fulfilled his purpose, and went to Spain. Many of the best expositors think he did not, but was hindered in this as he was in others of his purposes." On the collection he states the debt plainly — "the Gentiles were greatly beholden to the Jews, and were bound in gratitude to be very kind to them." On verse 30 he says we "must put forth all that is within us in that duty; pray with fixedness, faith, and fervency," and adds a warning: "Those who beg the prayers of others must not neglect to pray for themselves." And he reads Acts as the answer: "This prayer was answered in several remarkable deliverances of Paul."

V
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

## The Passage in the Whole Bible

*The plan Paul made, the gift he carried, and the way God actually brought him to Rome*

*"... I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

ISAIAH 49:6

*"Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.'"*

ACTS 19:21

*"They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do."*

GALATIANS 2:10

*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich."*

2 CORINTHIANS 8:9

*"Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;"*

ACTS 24:17

*"And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."*

ACTS 28:30–31

**DAVID GUZIK** · Enduring Word

Guzik reads Acts as the commentary on verses 22–33: Paul planned to stop in Corinth and sail for Jerusalem, and he did — but "He went to Rome as a prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar." Acts 24:17 shows him telling Felix that he had come "to bring alms to my nation," the very gift of Romans 15; Acts 28 shows him in Rome, chained but welcoming all who came. God answered the prayer of verse 32 by a road Paul would not have chosen.

**MATTHEW HENRY** · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry roots the Gentiles' praise in the whole Old Testament — he cites Psalm 22:22 alongside the psalms Paul quotes — because "there were many prophesies concerning them, which related to the calling of them." Isaiah 49:6 is that calling in one sentence: the Servant is a light to the nations, so that salvation reaches the end of the earth. Spain was, for Paul, the end of the earth.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

# At a Glance

*Four voices, one chapter*

The same chapter, read four ways. Guzik walks it verse by verse and keeps the pastor's eye on the church; Sproul presses the doctrine — the covenant with Israel, the finished priesthood of Christ; Spurgeon turns it into a call to joy, peace and prayer; and Henry gathers it into plain counsel for the Christian's conduct. They differ on whether Paul ever reached Spain, and the table says so.

| THE MOVEMENT | GUZIK · the text | SPROUL · the doctrine | SPURGEON · the heart | HENRY · the counsel |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **I · Bear the weak (1–6)** | Bearing up, not just bearing with; make the weak strong; God's delays are not His denials. | Pleasing for edification is a virtue; Psalm 69 is messianic; nothing comforts like the Word. | Handel wanted to make hearers better; the Old Testament is not outworn; Scripture ripens graces. | Christ's self-denial is the best argument against Christian selfishness; God is the fountain, Scripture the pipe. |
| **II · Accept one another (7–13)** | Receive one another in pure grace; the quotations show Jew and Gentile share common worship. | Receiving a brother glorifies God; mercy to Gentiles confirms the truth spoken to the Jews. | Christ did not receive us because we were perfect; peace is joy resting, joy is peace dancing. | Has Christ been so kind to us? Christ circumcised for Israel; true joy is the fruit of faith. |
| **III · A priest of the gospel (14–21)** | Verse 16 is full of priesthood; Paul glories only in Christ; Illyricum is the western Balkans. | Grace, not merit; not priests in the Old Testament or Roman sense; power is in the Word. | Paul says nothing of a sacrificing priesthood; the Spirit alone has power over the heart. | The Gentiles made priests unto God; a sanctified soul offered on Christ the altar; Paul broke the ice. |
| **IV · The road west (22–33)** | Rome a western base like Antioch; Paul likely reached Spain; prayers answered — in chains. | We do not know if Paul reached Spain; Gentiles grafted in owed Israel; a bullseye on his back. | Strive means agonise; repay Christ by praying for His servant; leave the way to God. | Not certain he reached Spain, many think not; Gentiles beholden to Jews; pray with fervency. |

ROMANS 15:1–33 · A COMPARATIVE READING

## † Key Insights to Carry

- **The strong carry, not just tolerate.** *Bastazō* (v. 1) is the verb of carrying the cross (John 19:17) and of bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). Guzik: bearing *up*, not just bearing *with*. THE GREEK
- **"Even Christ did not please Himself."** Paul answers a dispute about food with Psalm 69 and the cross. Henry: "The self-denial of our Lord Jesus is the best argument against the selfishness of Christians." HENRY
- **The same two gifts, two sources.** Perseverance and encouragement come "of the Scriptures" (v. 4) and from "the God who gives perseverance and encouragement" (v. 5) — the pipe and the fountain. THE TEXT
- **A mob's word made holy.** *Homothymadon*, "with one accord," is used ten times in Acts — of the praying church and of the mobs at Stephen's death and in Ephesus. Romans 15:6 is its only use elsewhere. THE GREEK
- **Receiving a brother is worship.** "When I receive you, I am not just being kind to you. … I am glorifying God." Verse 7 ends "to the glory of God." SPROUL
- **The whole Old Testament votes.** Law (Deuteronomy 32:43), Prophets (Isaiah 11:10) and Writings (Psalms 18:49; 117:1) all call the Gentiles to praise — and the chain ends on the word "hope." THE TEXT
- **Peace is joy resting.** Spurgeon on 15:13: "Peace is joy resting, and joy is peace dancing." Joy and peace come "in believing," not by working or feeling. SPURGEON

- **A priest whose altar is the gospel.** *Leitourgos*, *hierourgeō* (only here) and *prosphora* fill verse 16 — but the offering is people, sanctified by the Spirit. Spurgeon: of a sacrificing priesthood "he says nothing of the sort." SPURGEON
- **A gift is fellowship you can count.** The collection is *koinōnia* (v. 26), and the Gentiles "minister" (*leitourgēsai*) to Jerusalem — the same sacred-service word Paul used of his own ministry. THE GREEK
- **The prayer was answered by another road.** Paul asked to be rescued in Judea, to have his gift accepted, and to come to Rome in joy. Acts 21–28: rescued from a mob, kept alive, and brought to Rome in chains. Guzik: "answered, though not in the manner they expected." GUZIK

## † Questions for the Table

**1** **Who is the "weak" brother in your life right now — the man whose conscience, habits or struggles make him hard to carry? What would it look like this week to bear him up rather than just put up with him?**

Bastazō is a shoulder word: Christ carried the cross, and we carry each other's loads.

15:1-2; GALATIANS 6:2

**2** **Paul answers a quarrel over food with the cross: "even Christ did not please Himself." Where are you insisting on your own liberty, preference or comfort in a way Christ never would?**

Henry: His whole life was a self-denying, self-displeasing life.

15:3; PSALM 69:9; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7

**3** **Verse 4 says the Old Testament was written for our instruction so that we might have hope. What Old Testament passage has given you perseverance or encouragement in a hard season?**

The Scriptures are the conduit-pipe; God is the fountain-head.

15:4-5

**4** **"Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us." How did Christ accept you — and what does that standard say about the brother you are slow to accept?**

Christ did not receive us because we were perfect.

15:7; 14:1

**5** **Paul made his ambition to preach where Christ was not named. Who around you — at work, on your street, on the yard, in your family — has never really heard?**

Philotimeomai: a holy love of honor, aimed at the unreached.

15:20-21; ISAIAH 52:15

**6** **Paul asked a church he had never met to "strive together" with him in prayer, and God answered by a road he would not have chosen. What are you praying for that you need to leave "the way of its coming" to God?**

Spurgeon: pray for a blessing, and leave the way of its coming to the good Lord.

15:30-32; ACTS 28:30-31

*Romans 15 begins with one weak brother at one table and ends at the edge of the known world. The Christ who did not please Himself is the Christ the nations hope in, and the God of perseverance, of hope and of peace is with all who bear one another and carry the gospel west. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

*Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ*

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