

# Our Plans and God's Will

## Romans 15:22-29

All Christians want to know God's will for their lives. We want to know His will concerning major decisions, such as the career that we should pursue, the person that we should marry, and the place where we should live. We need His guidance on dozens of other daily decisions affecting our money, our time, and our relationships. If you know Christ as Savior and Lord, you want to please Him in every aspect of life by making wise decisions in line with His will.

Much of God's will is revealed in the commands and principles of His Word. You don't need to pray for guidance in these areas.

God's will for us is:

### I. God's will for you is **Salvation**.

A. (God our Savior) Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. - 1 Timothy 2:4 KJV

B. The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. - 2 Peter 3:9

C. Jesus Said, "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10

### II. God's will for you is **Sanctification**

A. Avoiding immorality and impurity: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;" - 1 Thessalonians 4:3

B. Wise living is God's will for us: "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." - Ephesians 5:17

C. Non-conformation, transformation, and renewal are God's will for us: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what [is] that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." - Romans 12:2

D. Continual rejoicing, ceaseless prayer, and constant thanksgiving are God's will for us: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

### II. God's will for you is **Security**:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." - John 6:38-40

### III. God's will for you is **Service**:

"not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart," - Ephesians 6:6;

#### IV. God's will for you is **Suffering**:

A. "For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." - I Peter 3:17;

B. "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator." - I Peter 4:19

All of these and many other decisions are clearly spelled out in God's Word. We simply need to understand and obey the commands and principles that are revealed in His Word.

*I will seek the will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them. -- George Mueller*

But what about a job change ... a move across the country ... where to go to college ... the call to foreign missions ... hiring new employees ... starting a business ... buying a new home ... dating and marriage... whether or not to have more children. The list is endless. There are many such decisions where we need to know how to discern God's specific will.

That brings us back to Romans 15:22-29. This passage offers a fascinating glimpse into the mind of the Apostle Paul. Essentially it is Paul's answer to the question, "Why haven't you visited Rome yet?" We know from Romans 1:11-13 that though he longed to visit the church at Rome, he had been prevented by his duties elsewhere. Now that his letter is nearly over, he returns to that theme at the end of Romans 15, this time offering a more detailed explanation of his current travel plans. These verses help us understand why Paul did what he did and the underlying priorities that guided his life. Let's see what we can learn from Paul's example.

Romans 15:22-33

**22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.**

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

**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.**

**25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.**

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

**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.**

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

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

**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,**

**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,**

**32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.**

**33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.**

In verse 32 Paul's desire is to come to Rome **"with joy by the will of God."** Let's look at how Paul followed the will of God and see how we can apply these principles to ourselves also.

### **1. Paul made the Kingdom of God his priority. (Rom. 15:22-24)**

In verse 22 Paul says **"For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you."** What reason? Going back few verses we see that Paul's priority has been on preaching to people who have not yet heard the gospel (see verses 18-21). So he has been **"hindered"** (v. 22) from coming to Rome because of his calling as a pioneer missionary. Although he desired greatly to see the church at Rome, he has delayed his trip there while preaching from Jerusalem all the way to the region of Illyricum (modern-day Albania northward along the Balkan Peninsula). When he says in verse 23, **"But now no longer having a place in these parts,"** he means that he has helped plant churches in many of the major cities so that eventually the gospel will spread to the outlying areas. That work has taken many years, but now that it is done, he feels free to consider making a trip to Rome.

His ultimate goal is to preach the gospel in Spain, at the western edge of the Mediterranean Sea. For Paul that would be going to the "uttermost parts of the earth." He hopes to stop in Rome and encourage the church there while on his way west to Spain.

Many of you have memorized the words of Jesus, **"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."** Matthew 6:33. That is what Paul did. He made the Kingdom of God a priority. He set aside his personal plans and desires for the sake of the Kingdom. His priority was to preach the gospel where Christ was not yet named. And since Rome already had a church established, preaching there was not his priority.

So Paul was hindered from coming to Rome earlier. Most of the time we think of a hindrance as a bad thing, but the hindrance that Paul had was a good thing. It kept him on his task, on the Lord's mission. He could not go to Rome while God still had work for him to do elsewhere.

And even his plans to come to Rome were made with the priority of the kingdom of God. Look at verse 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."** Paul's main goal was to go

to the unreached areas of Spain with the gospel. He planned his stopover in Rome not only to be refreshed and enjoy the company of the church there, but especially for the purpose of gaining their support for his mission to Spain.

So the first principle in discerning the will of God is to make the kingdom of God a priority.

## **2. Paul did what promoted unity in the church. (Rom. 15:25-28)**

In verses 25-28 Paul describes a further delay in his plans to visit Rome. His trip to Spain must be delayed for a while because he must first go to Jerusalem to take the offering he had collected from the Gentile Christians for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem (vv. 25-27). Verse 25 says, **“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.”** When you read Paul’s letters, you realize that this gift from the mostly Gentile churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem was a really big deal to Paul. He spends two chapters in 2 Corinthians (8 & 9) urging them to be generous in this effort. He spent several months that ended up (when he got arrested) being several years diverting his efforts from his normal priority of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles in order to administer this gift and make sure it got to Jerusalem safely. He could have delegated this to a trusted associate, but he felt that it was important enough to go personally. He even went to Jerusalem against two warnings from believers that Luke says came from the Holy Spirit (Acts 21:4, 10-14).

Paul deeply sympathized with the plight of his brothers in Jerusalem who were suffering enormous poverty and persecution. Everywhere he went in the Gentile world, he took an offering for the Jerusalem saints. This shows both his heart for the poor and his desire to promote unity in the body of Christ. Paul understood that the Gentile believers, sharing the same spiritual blessings as the poor Jewish saints, had a solemn obligation to help relieve their suffering. Verse 27 says, **“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.”** But this was more than an obligation—it was a joy to the Gentiles to make that offering to the Jerusalem church. Look at verse 26, **“For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed ...”**

Again, I believe that Paul thought that taking the gift to Jerusalem would have maximum impact for Christ’s church. In 15:25 he saw it as, “ministry to the saints.” He saw it as putting a seal on this fruit of the Gentile churches (15:28), **“Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit.”** This gift confirmed the bond of unity between the Gentile and Jewish believers in the church.

Giving is a form of fellowship. The Greek word translated **“contribution”** (15:26) is *koinonia*, “fellowship,” or sharing together. Giving to missionaries or to needy saints builds a bond of fellowship between you. So the church is made stronger and more united as Christians from many different backgrounds support each other.

Paul did what promoted unity in the church.

## **3. Paul made plans dependent on the blessing of Christ. (Rom. 15:29)**

Although Paul clearly states his great desire to visit the church at Rome, he cannot say when he will make the journey because he isn't sure himself. Paul lays out his general priorities, explains his immediate plans, and then says, "I hope to come to Rome on my way to Spain." Paul doesn't set dates or make promises he can't keep. The best he can do is to make an indefinite statement. Sometimes in doing God's will, that's the best course to follow.

James writes this about making plans,

**[Jas 4:13-15 NKJV] 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."**

Make the kingdom of God your priority, do what promotes the growth and unity of the church, make your plans, but realize it is the Lord who ultimately does His will.

we must anchor our lives to this final certainty: God's purposes always prevail. Paul doesn't know for certain that he'll make it to Rome and he certainly doesn't know when it will happen if it does happen, but he does know in Romans 15:29 that he "... **shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.**" Even when our plans get blown up, we can experience the full measure of blessing because while our immediate intentions might not be fulfilled, God's ultimate plans will always come to pass.

Here are some passages to hold on to when the unexpected events happen in your life:

**Proverbs 16:9: "A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."**

**Proverbs 19:21: "There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the LORD's counsel—that will stand."**

**Jeremiah 10:23: "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.."**

Paul did make it to Rome but not in the way he had imagined. Instead of smooth sailing to Rome after dropping off the offering, forty enemies in Jerusalem took an oath not to eat or sleep until they killed Paul. He was dragged out of the Temple, beaten severely, arrested and put in prison for two years before he was put on a boat to Rome. On the voyage, chained up as a prisoner, the boat was shipwrecked and he was delayed again. When he finally made it to Rome he was placed under guard until his trial before Caesar.

We're not certain if he ever made it to Spain but we do know that the gospel message rang out from Paul even while he was in prison. He had the opportunity of preaching to governmental officials and people visited him in jail and were ministered to. On top of that, Paul's long delay in traveling to Rome led him to write the life-changing letter that we now call "The Book of Romans." And from prison he would eventually write Ephesians, Colossians, and Philipians.

The will of God is not a destination, it's a journey...I remember what Job said: 'He knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold' (Job 23:10). He knows the way that I take even when I don't. He knows the way that I take even when I can't see clearly. He knows the way that I take even when I get lost. Our God is infinitely creative in the ways he deals with his children. Let this be our motto as we seek to do God's will: Expect the unexpected, and enjoy the journey.

#### **4. Paul prays for God's will to be done (Romans 15:30-33)**

Paul's submission to God's will is reflected in his prayer requests, recorded in verses 30-32, along with a benediction in verse 33.

*First*, Paul requested that these saints pray for him that he “**may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe**” (verse 31). Paul had been warned of the dangers which awaited him in Jerusalem. The danger ahead did not deter Paul from pressing on to Jerusalem, but it did prompt him to ask the Roman saints to pray for him.

Second, Paul asked the saints in Rome to pray that his service to the saints in Jerusalem might be effective, that it “**may be acceptable to the saints**” (verse 31). The Gentiles gladly gave to minister to the Jewish saints, but would the Jews gladly receive these gifts? Paul asked for prayer that they would.

Finally, Paul asked for prayer that with “**joy by the will of God**,” he would come to them and be “**refreshed together**” in their fellowship (verse 32).

A benediction is pronounced in verse 33: “**Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.**” If Paul had not been able to be with the Romans, and if his coming to them was still to be delayed, they could find great comfort in knowing that the “God of peace” was with them, always. Paul was absent; God was not.

How this prayer was answered is another story recorded in Acts 20-28. Once again, God worked in ways beyond human anticipation. Paul would indeed be delivered from the unbelieving Jews and arrive safely in Rome, thanks to his arrest and the Roman government. God works in wondrous ways.

Ray Pritchard gives this advice to everyone who wants to know and do God's will:

- Seek first God's kingdom in your life and in the world.
- Make the best plans that you can.
- Humbly submit them to your Heavenly Father, saying, 'your will be done.'
- Take the next step that is in front of you.
- Trust God to take care of everything else.

For all of us the future lies hidden in the hands of a loving God. It is enough to know that God loves us and is for us and therefore we can trust him with the details of life.