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Reflections on Duty & Desire

Romans, Part LXVII

Romans 15:22-33

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I. Introduction

Romans 15:22–33 (NKJV)

²²For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. ²³But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, ²⁴whenever 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.

²⁵But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷It 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. ²⁸Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. ²⁹But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

³⁰Now 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, ³¹that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. ³³Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.

II. Paul's Plans and Requests

A. Paul Explains His Delay and Desires (22-24 cf. 1:11-12)

Because Paul has been busy preaching the Gospel from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum (cf. 19), he has been unable to visit the Romans. However, his work in *these parts* was completed, and so he hopes to travel through Rome on his way *to* _____.

B. Paul Outlines His Current Obligation (25-29)

Before he can act on this *desire*, however, Paul has an obligation to fulfill. He is traveling to Jerusalem to minister to the saints there. Why? Because the saints in Macedonia and Greece raised financial support for the _____ in Jerusalem and Paul agreed to deliver that gift personally.

C. Paul Requests the Romans' Prayers (30-33)

Thus far Paul's plans. But what do we know about the best laid plans? They are wholly and completely dependent upon _____. As James writes (4:13-16):

¹³Come 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"; ¹⁴whereas 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. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." ¹⁶But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

III. Reflections on Duty and Desire

A. Our duties are distinct from our desires (cf. Jn 13:13-14)

First, Paul teaches us to distinguish our *desires* and our *duties*. So what are our *desires*? Our _____ are our longings, our wants. So consider the *desires* Paul mentions:

- 23 – Paul has had a *great desire* these many years to come to Rome;
- 24 – Paul *hopes* [desires] to see the Romans on his journey to Spain;
- 26 – The Macedonians and Greeks desired to relieve the poverty of the saints in Jerusalem;

So what are our *duties*? Our _____ are our obligations, the things we *ought to do*. We see *duties* reflected in Paul’s writing here as well:

- 25 – Paul cannot go to Rome yet because he has a *duty* to deliver the offering to Jerusalem;
- 27 – Giving to the saints in Jerusalem was not only the Macedonians’ *desire* but their *duty*;
- 29 – Having fulfilled his duty to bless the believers in Jerusalem, Paul will finally travel to Rome;

Notice that the existence of such *duties* reveals that we humans live in a moral universe created and ruled by the righteous and good God.

B. Our duties sometimes match our desires (cf. Jn 4:34; 8:28-29)

Sometimes our *duties* match our *desires*. In such circumstances, doing our duty is rather easy. So notice in our text today the *desire* and *duty* of the Macedonians aligned (26-27). This was frequently the case, of course, in the life of our Lord Jesus. He told the disciples, “My _____ [*desire*] is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (Jn 4:34). He says later in John’s Gospel, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him [that He desires]” (Jn 8:28-29). Jesus longed to do the Father’s will and joyfully listened to His Father in heaven. His duty was His delight.

Jesus’ example reveals that we should be continually reshaping our desires so that they reflect the desires of our Lord – we should align our desires with our _____, our “get to-s” with our “got to-s.” We should ask ourselves, “How am I doing? Are my desires matching my obligations?” If they aren’t there’s a problem – but it’s not a problem with the obligations, it’s a problem with my _____.

C. Our duties must sometimes trump our desires (cf. Ps 15:4)

Sometimes *our duties must trump our desires*. This is, of course, always the case when our desires are sinful. *When my desires are contrary to my duty, then I must do my duty not act on my desires*. But this is also the case even when our desires are good. **Our _____ are more important than our desires.** So our Lord Jesus said, “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will [My own desires], but the will [the desires] of Him who sent Me” (Jn 6:38). And when He was tempted in the Garden of Gethsemane, He concluded, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Lk 22:42).

Just because we have a _____ to do something doesn’t mean that we should do it. We must always do our duty even if our desires are contrary. The man who fears God “swears to his own hurt and does not change” (Ps 15:4). “Duty then is the sublimest word in the English language. You should do your duty in all things. You can never do more, you should never wish to do less.” (Robert E. Lee) Duties trump desires.

IV. Conclusion (Heb 12:2)