



# The Letter to the Romans

## Good News for All People

### 3. A PREACHER IN DEBT

Romans 1:8-15

#### INTRODUCTION

The opening part of Paul's letter to the Romans begins in verse 1 and runs through verse 15. We might call this the introduction of the letter. The opening consists of two parts: the salutation in verses 1-7, and the thanksgiving in verses 8-15. These are standard conventions for New Testament letters, but they are rather longer in Romans than other letters.

The salutation in verses 1-7 identify the author and recipients of the letter and greets them. From the start, Paul introduces the unifying theme of his letter, which is the gospel. Paul states how the gospel originates with God and was promised before in the Old Testament Scriptures (the law and the prophets). The gospel promise concerns God's Son. He was born in the flesh as a descendant of David and he died and was raised to life through the Holy Spirit to power. Jesus gives grace to Jews and Gentiles alike. He called his apostles to witness his resurrection and to give his words to those who believe. Paul was especially called to proclaim his name and his salvation among the Gentiles. The proper response to God's good news of his Son is "obedience to the faith" (Romans 1:5). Submitting to the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of David and God's Son in power. The salutation sets the tone for the whole letter by emphasizing the importance of the gospel for bringing Jews and Gentiles to faith and to unity in the same body.

Verses 8-15 are the second part of the introductory opening of the letter. It is a thanksgiving section where Paul expresses his thankfulness for the Roman church(es). Paul also explains his travel plans with an explanation for not visiting them at the point. He wrote that wanted to visit them to strengthen them in the faith and to preach the gospel in Rome.

### **Passage Outline**

1. Verses 8-12 Paul's Desire to Go to Rome
2. Verses 13-15 Paul's Explanation of Why he Hasn't Yet Been to Rome

## **VERSES 8-12 PAUL'S DESIRE TO GO TO ROME**

**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.**

- Romans 1:8

As you read on from here, you notice Paul begins with "First," but there is no second or third. He's not giving a sequence like a numbered list of items. This introductory section explains why Paul is writing to them in the way and time he is writing. So, his use of first here is for priority. He wants to ensure that they know of his thankfulness for them and his continued prayers for them, before he gets on to what he wants to say in the body of the letter.

Paul was genuinely thankful for the faithful Christians in Rome, the capital city of the world-ruling Roman Empire. He was specifically thankful for the testimony of their faith. Word of their faith, their belief, teaching, and practice, had gone throughout the world. Their testimony was known through the churches in various places at the time. Of course, we can't assume all their press was positive. Historically, Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49, because of their constant agitation and disputing about Chrestus. This name was a latinized form of Christ, or referred to him. They were allowed back into the city of Rome about five years later. Their return would have been about three years before Paul wrote this letter. The controversy over Chrestus among the Jews in Rome was certainly due to the influence and preaching of the church(es) in Rome.

**For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;**

- Romans 1:9

Paul assures the Roman Christians he prays for them. He assures them with three particular evidences. First, he called God to witness his prayers. Second, he states that he hasn't ceased, or left off praying for them. Third, he mentioned them in his prayers always, or continually.

Paul foreshadowed his further explanation of why he hadn't yet been to Rome. He first introduced himself as the slave of Jesus (Romans 1:1), meaning his will was fully submitted to the will of his master. Paul might desire, plan, and even attempt to do something, but he knew he wasn't in control of his own life and he was willingly yielded to God for God's service. We can see an example of Paul's submission when he tried to preach in Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit in some way did not allow it (Acts 16:6-7).

Paul further explained he serves God through the Spirit in the gospel of God's Son. He had been called and commissioned to gospel service (Romans 1:1, 5). Paul had learned long ago that though he was committed to expand the declaration of the gospel to the entire world, he was submitted to the Lord of the gospel and served according to his will.

**Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.**

- Romans 1:10

Paul mentioned his specific request in prayer to visit the brothers in Rome. He acknowledged his submission to God's will in the matter. He had prayed and asked for this if it was according to God's will.

**For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;**

- Romans 1:11

Paul further states the reason for his desire to visit Rome. He wanted to give them a spiritual gift. The context of the verse through verse 13 gives clarity that Paul is referring to spiritual ministry among them. The gift is related to teaching and preaching, so he wants to give them insight into spiritual truth.

The end, or goal, of this spiritual gift is their being established. The word means stabilized, or made firm. The same word is also used at the end of the letter in Romans 16:25. Paul used this word similarly in both epistles to the Thessalonians:

“And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith”

(1 Thessalonians 3:2).

“Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work”

(2 Thessalonians 2:17).

**That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.**

- Romans 1:12

Paul further explains the spiritual gift. His presence among them, his taking part in their ministry, their fellowship, will mutually edify and encourage Paul and the Roman Christians. The word used does mean comforted, or encouraged together. It refers to joint, or mutual, consolation. Paul would be comforted and encouraged by his presence among them

and witnessing their faith.

## **VERSES 13-15 PAUL'S EXPLANATION OF WHY HE HASN'T YET BEEN TO ROME**

**Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.**

- Romans 1:13

Paul was concerned that they know why he hadn't yet been to Rome. He expressed a great desire and continual prayer to visit Rome. Perhaps he has been asked about this, or at least he anticipated the question. He mentions he had often meant to come to Rome but had been prevented. He doesn't say when he had tried to come or what had prevented him at those times. We can infer from the context that his service for Christ had somehow prevented his visit to Rome so far.

Paul may have been merely informing the brothers in Rome, he may have anticipated a problem, or maybe he had already been questioned about it. When a planned visit to Corinth didn't happen, it caused a problem and some questioned his integrity (2 Corinthians 1:15-18). We don't have any indication of such a problem in Rome, but he does explain why he hadn't yet visited.

Paul wanted to visit to "have some fruit among" them. In the next couple of verses he refers to preaching the gospel, so immediately this fruit would be the fruit of faith. It would be people coming to faith in Christ. As Paul hints at the scope of his mission, he could also be planting a seed to the tangible fruits of faith in supporting the proposed mission to Spain. He certainly speaks that way at the end of the letter (Romans 15:23-29). He uses the same word for fruit there as he does here.

**I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.**

- Romans 1:14

Paul refers to his debt, or his obligation. He had been put under obligation to the Gentiles to preach the gospel to them: "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:" (Acts 9:15). His commission compelled him to go everywhere Gentiles were.

Paul was driven by the prophetic vision of converted Gentiles where the glory and fame of God's name was spread among the nations.

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.

I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations.

(Psalm 57:5, 9)

To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm or Song. God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah.

That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.

Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.

O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah.

Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.

Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.

God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

(Psalm 67:1-7)

A Psalm. O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.

The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.

He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

(Psalm 98:1-3)

Almost a decade before Paul wrote this letter, he was in Jerusalem for the council with the church there about the salvation of the Gentiles. James, not the Apostle but the chief elder of the church, spoke of how the salvation of the Gentiles they were seeing was in agreement with the prophets, and he quoted Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:13-18).

Paul wrote he was indebted to Greeks, barbarians, the wise, and the unwise. Greeks was the designation for the cultured and educated class of the Graeco-Roman world. Barbarians were in contrast and referred to primitive, uneducated, uncultured peoples. He further distinguished between the wise and foolish. Paul means the gospel is good news for all people and is to be preached to all people, regardless of class, nationality, culture, blue collar, white collar, etc.

**So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.**

- Romans 1:15

Paul finally explains he is ready to preach the gospel in Rome with all that's in him. His absence from Rome had not been due to any lack of desire, or even attempts to get there, on his part. This verse concludes the letter introduction and highlights how the gospel was Paul's first priority.

## CONCLUSION

The churches in Rome had a reputation and testimony that spread far beyond the city of Rome. The preaching of the gospel there led to an uproar among the Jews, which led to an edict of expulsion. Almost a decade after this letter was written, persecution against Christians broke out severely. Obedience to the faith means preaching and living for Jesus Christ and that causes friction in a world devoted to self and sin. This is always the case. We should not have a bad reputation in the world because of being bad neighbors, having bad attitudes, or being unkind and unloving. We also should not seek to avoid the offense of the gospel in order to seek acceptance and the approval of a world at odds with God and his Son.

We are 2,000 years removed from the church in Rome and the Apostle Paul. Also, Paul was a specially called and commissioned Apostle, which we are not. There are aspects of his ministry that are not repeated or replicated in anyone else. However, there are still many ways he provides an example and pattern for ministry still today. It is obvious from the opening of this letter, along with considerable other evidence in the New Testament, the gospel was of first importance to Paul. The gospel was his top priority. The gospel motivated Paul to preach it zealously.

To say the gospel is of first importance is not to say the gospel is the only truth in the Bible, or that other teachings in the Bible are unimportant. Whatever else we may have, if we do not have the gospel right and the gospel is not at the center of all we do, we are not a church of Jesus Christ and whatever else we do doesn't matter. Whatever our station and stage of life, we should be zealous for the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. It is our great aim as a church. We should pray together fervently that this sort of gospel zeal will burn in all of our hearts.

## **ABOUT THIS SERIES**

This series is a verse by verse expository study of the Letter to the Romans. Each sermon typically covers one paragraph of the text of the letter. This PDF is provided freely for personal study. Each sermon has been prepared and preached by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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