

An Attempt To Listen To God

Survey of Romans Epistle

By

Rowan Jennings

Introduction

The book of Romans deals with two major avenues of thought:

- 1) A revelation of the man who wrote it (mainly chs. 7-8)
- 2) An expounding of the gospel of God (Rom. 1:1); “His Son” (Rom. 1:9); “of Christ” (Rom.1:16).

In studying Romans there is often great consideration given to the greatness of the gospel and less given to God’s inspired penman, Paul. For that reason I want to consider Paul, for Romans was written at a critical time of His life.

The Author

Paul was a man who not only knew and preached the gospel, but he had a passion for it. He was one of those multi gifted men, having a shepherds heart for the sheep, and an evangelist’s heart for the unsaved. Because of this preaching the gospel was not a job, but a heavy hearted burden (Rom. 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:16).

- 1) He had a burden to go to Rome, in part, to answer some unsettling questions and preach the gospel.
- 2) His present work had ended, which leads to the question: “How does one know their work in an area has ended?”
- 3) He had a gift from Corinth for the saints at Jerusalem, but would they, being Jews, accept the liberality of the Gentiles?
- 4) There was danger at Jerusalem. There were those who sought his life. Should he still go?

Furthermore, he sought to fulfil that call with purity of motive and reason (1 Cor. 9:18). His only reason for proclaiming it was that others might be received by God’s grace (Eph. 2:8-9) for the “glory of God” (Rom. 15:7). This message had a living vibrancy that was nothing short of divine energizing. It was the “power of God” (Rom. 1:16).

Paul Had A Burden To Go To Rome

The burden to go to Rome was not a sudden impulse or desire to see the Colosseum. All that mattered to him was that there were several groups of believers there whom He prayed for (Rom. 1:9). He longed to see them to: “. . . impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established” (Rom. 1:11). Paul’s desire personally (Phil. 3:12), and for the saints was that they would grow spiritually (Eph. 4:15) and be established in the truth of God (1 Cor. 15:58). Peter was the same (2 Pet. 1:2).

It was a work of the Holy Spirit with his spirit that had been brooding for a long time. The following verses make us aware of these truths:

- 1) “After these things were ended, Paul purposed in spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” (Acts.19:21)
- 2) “If by any means now at length . . . by the will of God to come unto you.” (Rom. 1:10)
- 3) “Ofentimes I purposed to come unto you, but was hindered.” (Rom. 1:13)
- 4) “I have been much hindered from coming to you.” (Rom. 15:22)

As previously stated, this was not a fleshy impulse to just go to Rome, for he is careful to tell them at least four reasons for that desire:

- 1) “That I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established” (Rom. 1:11). This showed that there was a spiritual shakiness among the saints. Their faith was being tested.
- 2) “That I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles” (Rom. 1:13). In this clause we get the first hint of His burden for the spread of the Gospel, a point he goes on to expand by writing: “I am debtor both to Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also” (Rom. 1:14).

- a) Interestingly he does not say: “To those who are unsaved around you”. He wanted to preach the gospel to the saints already in Rome! This on the surface seems strange, preaching to the saved. It looks very much like so many “gospel meetings” when only saved are present. To Paul, preaching the gospel was not just to speak on a Sunday evening for 30 minutes, it was to cause the saints to fully appreciate the wonder and glory of salvation, its vitalness to every soul of man, and the obligated practical results demanded by it. This message must not be obscured, therefore he writes: “I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God” (Rom. 15:15). He wanted them to be better equipped to face the opposition of the unsaved world.
- 3) That they would bring him on his way to Spain. Paul lived by faith, and yet the saints needed a gentle reminder of their obligations. If they received spiritual food from Paul they were to return to him of their material goods, namely financial help, or make connections with others for him on the route to Spain (Rom. 15:24).
- 4) It was his desire to pioneer the gospel, “to preach in unevangelized areas” (Rom. 15:20; 2 Cor. 10:16), and he had come to the edge of the eastern empire (Rom. 15:23) having preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Rom. 15:19) and now planned to continue his ministry to the western limit of the empire by going to Spain (Rom. 15:24).

His Work Had Ended

- 1) “But now having no more place in these parts.” (Rom. 15:23)
- 2) He spent 3 months in Greece, and it is generally accepted that it was from there he wrote Romans (Acts 20:22-23). However, it is not specifically said so in the scriptures.

Paul knew his time in these parts had ended because:

- a) God told Him to go. (Acts 13:17; 22:21)
- b) He was sent by God. (Acts 26:17)
- c) The rejection of the gospel by the Jews. (Acts 13:46)
- d) Of the intensity of Jewish opposition. (Acts 18:6)

Yet, despite that which Agabus had told of Paul being handed over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:11), and the pleadings of the saints (Acts 21:12), he must go to Jerusalem and the Gentiles.

When the Jews rejected the gospel, Paul says: “We turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46), what about all the promises to the fathers? That is, how could it be that Israel, the chosen recipient of the blessings, should lose out by them being given to the Gentiles? Such questions as these must be faced and answered. This he does in chs. 9-11.

He had a gift from Corinth for the saints at Jerusalem, but would they, being Jews, accept the liberality of the Gentiles?

“But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister to the saints, pray that my service will be accepted” (Rom 15:25). The divisions between Jew and Gentile was very hard for both to get over and Paul was going to the principally Jewish congregation at Jerusalem with a gift from Gentiles. Would they accept the gift?

There was danger at Jerusalem. There were those who sought his life. Should he still go?

- 1) “And when he (Agabus) was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. (Acts 21:11)
- 2) “Pray that I may be delivered from them that believe not in Judea.” (Rom. 15:31)

- 3) “Now . . . I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there.” He knew well the hostility of the Jewish leaders to the gospel and his going to the Gentiles. (Acts 20:3-4; 11:13-17; 22).
- 4) “Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 21:13)

Practical

There is a tendency to see preachers as super spiritual, but Paul was a realist, and in brutal honesty he tells of the war he faced within himself and would let them know he is personally aware of their struggles. Paul begins to trace his ongoing spiritual pathway since conversion. On that spiritual pathway he learnt:

- a) The sinfulness of his own being. (Rom. 7: 24)
- b) The law of sin in himself brings death (spiritual and physical). (Rom. 8:2)
- c) He was “sold under sin”. (Rom. 7:14)
- d) The strength of indwelling sin and his ongoing struggle with it. (Rom. 7:15-19)
- e) The only way of victory is through Jesus Christ. (Rom.7:25)

The only way to really appreciate the necessity for salvation is to see my personal need. God is a realist and lets us learn the weakness of other saints which, humanly speaking, if we committed we would like to cover up. For instance:

- a) Noah and his drunken state. (Gen. 19:20-22)
- b) David and Bathsheba. (2 Sam. 11:2-12)
- c) Peter and his denial. (Lk. 22:57; 24:16)
- d) Samson and his womanizing. (Jud. 14:1; 16:6)
- e) Lot and his unconscious incestuous relationship. (Gen. 19:33-35)

It is then we learn the super abundance of divine grace and love.

The Epistle

The Romans epistle was dictated by the Apostle Paul, and written down by Tertius (Rom. 16:22). It was possibly written from Corinth, and conveyed by Phoebe who was going to Rome, from the port of Cenchræa. While we cannot be precise about when it was written, it seems to be between 55-58 A.D. Paul did not go personally for he was on his way to Jerusalem with a gift (2 Cor. 8-9 ; Rom 15:25-29, Acts 20:13). It was written to an established church even though he had not been there. Yet, he does write as an apostle (Rom. 1:1).

Paul wrote to seven churches in the New Testament and visited multiple cities. He did not go to these cities at random, but they were all major cities! Rome, Ephesus, Thessalonica! Why did he do this? One reason is that by reaching the multicultural peoples in those centers, the gospel would go out to others in the outlying areas.

- 1) At Pentecost there were Jews from multiple parts of the then known world, having travelled there from many places including Rome.
- 2) In 63 B.C. Pompey brought Jewish slaves and there they heard the Gospel (Acts 2:10). It's likely some returned converted.
- 3) In AD 49 Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2) because of riots among them about a man named Chrestus, which seems to be a synonym for “Christ”. This persecution apparently was far spread for it is similar to that which happened at Iconium Lystra, Derbe, and Jerusalem. (Acts 13:52, 18:12, 17)

Later a number of Jewish believers went back to Jerusalem among whom were Aquila and Priscilla his wife (Acts 18:2). Later Paul arrived there (Acts 28:21-25) but the synagogues leaders were cautious concerning him. He was ultimately accepted and recognized for the gift God had given him. With his Pharisaical background knowledge of the law (Acts 22:2-3), Paul was able to apply its truths, thus expanding their understanding in the blending between God's will revealed in the Old Testament and the Gospel.

We are not told of any distinct doctrinal problems, although there were practical ones (Rom. 6:14), and the only way to set such matters clear is a solid reinforcing of the universality of the Gospel in both its need and effects.

Paul methodically set out man's willful, hopeless sinfulness, and God's perfect righteous, and God's gracious provision for man's salvation provided for in the sacrificial vicarious death of Christ. The Gospel was freely offered to all as a gift, which affected all those who believed and accepted the Living Saviour.

That this Salvation is unique, and central, is stated in ch.1:16-17 in that embedded in its message and essential being it is the power of God. It is to be noted that the word "power" is not "dynamite of God" but the "dynamic of God". Divine life and energy is inherent in the gospel.

For Paul, the preaching of the gospel was not just a Sunday night occurrence. It was vital for every human being, from every race, whether they be Irish, Portuguese, Oriental, or black etc. He drives home the essential practical consequences of salvation, writing with a burning desire to move all his readers and to bring Glory to God by entering, as fully as possible, into the wonderful privileges of Life in Christ, as he himself was doing. He is not just interested in seeing people saved, much less join a certain congregation. It was for the glory of God.

The logical character is seen in the expressions:

- 1) "Know ye not" (3 occurrences)
- 2) "but" (127 occurrences)
- 3) "for"(218 occurrences)

One verse in particular has been used of God in a mighty way: "The just shall live by faith" (ch. 1:17. It was this verse that the Holy Spirit used to enlighten Martin Luther.

When Martin Luther went to Rome, he visited the churches that claimed to have sacred relics, even climbing on his hands and knees the 28 steps in front of the Lateran church. It appears that on each step he said the Lord's Prayer. When at the top, the question by the Holy Spirit was brought to him: "But what if it doesn't work?" Going back to Erfurt and seeking further help, he was told to read Augustine, which led Him to read the New Testament, and Paul's letters. It was only after several years in Wittenberg he found the answer in the clause: "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16-17). Wesley (1707-1788) read Luther's commentary, and seeing the truth of assurance of salvation, preached the gospel throughout England in a mighty revival.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

Copyright © 2012 by Rowan Jennings, Abbotsford, British Columbia