

CHAPTER II

ROMANS 1:8-15 - INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL

As the salutation has moved from definitive apostolic and gospel identification to a more particular address of the Roman saints, so Paul now becomes far more personal and spiritually intimate in his paving the way for instruction in the meat and marrow of the gospel. Here is evidenced heartfelt pastoral warmth, after the manner of a tender “nursing mother, . . . a father” (I Thess. 2:7, 11). Paul well knows that he intends to minister in his letter, “very boldly [daringly, *τολμηρός*, *tolmēros*, cf. II Pet. 2:10] to you on some points,” 15:15, yet his anticipated visit will be marked by spiritual enjoyment, material assistance, rest, and “the fulness of the blessing of Christ,” 16:24, 29, 32. In spite of his inherent authority, Paul also looks forward to mutual encouragement with a congregation that is in no way described as immature, 1:8, 12; 15:14.

A. PAUL’S PRAYERFUL DELIGHT IN THE ROMANS, VS. 8-12

His characteristic, prayerful manner of thanksgiving at the outset (I Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3-4; Col. 1:3; I Thess. 1:2; II Thess. 1:3; II Tim. 1:3; Philem. 4-5) reflects his overall prayerful style of writing, 6:17; 7:25; 10:1; 12:12; 15:30.

1. Their gospel witness to the world, v. 8.
 - a. The manner of Paul’s grateful address is here, as elsewhere, to “my God” (I Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3, 12; 3:17) the Father “through Jesus Christ,” that is the access that his atonement has obtained (Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; I Pet. 2:5).
 - b. The happy concern of Paul’s address is the Roman saints’ evident faith, or “the faith,” or personal gospel witness that has been effectively “proclaimed,” *καταγγέλλω*, *katangellō*, or witnessed/announced throughout “the whole world.” This expression of universal outreach is not mere hyperbole for the whole inhabited earth, but rather, as similarly described in Acts 19:10, 20, indicative of the pervasive gospel witness that resulted through the agencies and populace of the Roman empire. Several years later, when imprisoned in Rome, the Apostle will send greetings to the church at Philippi from the saints “of Caesar’s household” (Phil. 4:22), that is converts of “the imperial household, the meanest slaves as well as the most powerful courtiers.”¹
 - c. In these times of spiritual declension, such a commendation of the church at Rome by Paul ought to make us feel jealous for such an authentic and effective ministry. The Roman historian Tacitus tells us that, during the early years of the first century, Rome was a “receptacle for everything that is sordid and degrading from every quarter of the globe.”² Yet while suffering unspeakable persecution as the

¹ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 171.

² Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 2.

objects of sadistic sport, the Christians made an indelible impression. Early in the second century the Letter to Diognetus, by an anonymous Christian, tells of how this holy influence challenged an unholy world. “Every foreign land is their fatherland and every fatherland a foreign land. They marry as do all; they beget children, but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh but do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all.”³

2. His pastoral prayer for the brethren, vs. 9-10.

While Paul is constantly active in prayer, yet the substance of his praying is the cause of the gospel, and particularly those saved by the gospel and their gospel ministry. All of this interest subsumes under his soul’s unqualified service of God and His gospel (1:1). The subsequent, grand exposition of this gospel only reinforces this point.

a. It is gospel grounded praying, v. 9.

As is common with the Apostle’s manner of praying, he addresses God the Father through God the Son (I Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:16-17; Col. 1:3). Here, in the form of an oath as a way of being emphatic (cf. II Cor. 1:23; 11:31; Gal. 1:20; I Thess. 2:5), Paul passionately declares his commitment to the Roman saints. His service to God is singular, “in his spirit,” and dominated by the gospel of the grace of God. Such devotion is thus directed through the saints at Rome; its transparent sincerity is intended to gain the ready acceptance of what follows. Paul’s knowledge of such ecumenical proclamation by the Roman saints “throughout the whole world” indicates not only his regular contact through numerous couriers and missionaries with various Christian churches and settlements amongst the Gentiles, but also his promotion of this network of ministry.

However, for a man so committed to the sovereignty of God in all of his labors, does not such an emphasis on prayer inject a conflict involving contingency? Haldane comments:

But since all events are fixed, even from eternity, in the counsels and wisdom of God, of what avail, it may be said are these prayers? Can they change his eternal counsels, and the settled order of events? Certainly not. But God commands us to pray, and even the prayers of his people are included in his decrees; and what God has resolved to do, he often gives to their prayers. Instead of them being vain, they are among the means through which God executes his decrees.⁴

b. It is a yearning to come to Rome, v. 10.

Why did Paul travel so much? It was not to see the sights of such places as Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus, in conjunction with his missionary endeavors, but for the exclusive cause of the souls of men. Likewise his interest in Rome did not include

³ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, pp. 135-6.

⁴ Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 37.

a cultural regard for the Forum, Colosseum, Circus Maximus, Pantheon, etc., but “you,” the “beloved of God in Rome, called as saints,” v. 7. However, his personal desire in this regard must yield to God’s timing. Hence Paul’s mention here of the “will of God” indicates that he did not perceive his travels to be arranged according to his own itinerary.

3. His pastoral desire to stimulate maturity, v. 11.

- a. Paul particularly desires to “impart some spiritual gift” to the body of Roman believers, and obviously this necessitated his physical presence. Better, he desired to “share,” μεταδίδωμι, metadidōmi, cf. I Thess. 2:8), that is his own spiritual ministry, cf. v. 12, with the intent of stimulating “fruitfulness,” v. 13. Lloyd-Jones comments, “Surely the explanation is that he wants to visit them at Rome in order that he may do thoroughly for them what he is now doing in a summary form in the letter that he is now writing to them. . . . And the way in which he does that is by means of the teaching.”⁵
- b. Whether with his letter or presence, Paul’s primary interest in the Roman Christians is the stability of their faith. The word “to establish” here is στηρίζω, stērizō, and its use in 16:25 indicates that it is the gospel of “the only wise God,” v. 27, mediated through Paul’s preaching of “Jesus Christ” (cf. Acts 18:23; I Thess. 3:2). Again we see the significance of the sanctifying effect of the gospel and related truth.

4. His pastoral desire for mutual fellowship, v. 12.

With gentle qualification concerning, “that you may be established,” v. 11, Paul adds that he desires “mutual comfort/encouragement,” συμπαρακαλέω, sumparakaleō. He has no desire to convey an air of apostolic dominance such as in an hierarchical sense represented by the papacy or episcopacy; rather he will stimulate spiritual growth with a sweet and humble spirit. As Charles Wesley has written:

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
Who joins us by His grace,
And bids us, each to each restored,
Together seek His face.

He bids us build each other up;
And, gathered into one,
To our high calling’s glorious hope
We hand in hand go on.

⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 1:1-32*, p. 226.

B. PAUL'S RELUCTANT DELAY WITH THE ROMANS, VS. 13-15

The Apostle is like a frustrated parent who, having been separated from his children, anxiously longs for immediate reunion. He acknowledges this church to be aligned with the Gentiles and as such is part of his paternal concern, especially with regard to ministering the gospel to them.

1. He is prevented from coming to them, v. 13.
 - a. The reason(s) are not revealed and can only be speculative, such as revelation, persecution, travel restrictions, pastoral needs, etc. However, Haldane comments: "His [Paul's] being hindered, by whatever means, from going to Rome, when he intended it, shows that the Apostles were sometimes thwarted in their purposes, and were not always under the guidance of Divine inspiration in their plans."⁶
 - b. The fruit sought, while possibly a collection for Jerusalem as received from other Gentile churches, is most likely spiritual productivity that results in the "stability" mentioned in v. 11 (cf. "fruit" καρπός, karpos, used in this sense, 6:21, 22; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9; Phil. 1:11; also John 15:16). Paul was "results" oriented in his ministry, though not in any modern, carnal statistical sense; rather he longed for spiritual maturity in the Gentiles churches (Eph. 4:13-16), even safe and sanctified arrival before "our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming" (I Thess. 2:11-12, 19).
2. He is obliged to minister to them, v. 14.
 - a. Why is Paul under "obligation"?
 - (1) Because he has received a specific apostolic calling.

He is a minister under authority, having been sovereignly called of God (1:1; Acts 13:2; Gal. 1:15). I Corinthians 9:16-17 best explains this weight of responsibility, where it is described as "compulsion" or necessity, and "stewardship entrusted unto me" or commission as a slave.
 - (2) Because he has received a specific apostolic mandate.

He is a minister under orders to primarily declare the gospel to the Gentiles, though not exclusively (Acts 9:15-16; 18:1-6; 19:1-10). Ephesians 3:6-7 best explains this universal directive where Paul is a "minister," διάκονος, diakonos, or servant commanded to "preach to the Gentiles [hence the whole inhabited earth] the unfathomable riches of Christ."
 - b. To "whom" is Paul under obligation?

The Christian assembly at Rome was undoubtedly composed of a large segment of Gentiles, among who were representatives of the various stratas of that society, though with the lower classes predominating. Hence Paul is intent on making

⁶ Haldane, *Romans*, p. 51.

clear that “his gospel” (2:16) is for sinners of every stripe without distinction; it is not merely for the intelligentsia. Of course the question of Israel’s relationship to this gospel will be dealt with in chapters 9-11. His coming will not focus merely on patricians, as the following diagram illustrates.

PAUL’S MINISTRY TO THE NON-JEWISH WORLD	
Greeks ἑλλησινC (hellēsin)	barbarians βαρβάρους (barbarois)
articulate sinners	babbling sinners
wise sinners	foolish sinners
patrician sinners	plebeian sinners
upper class sinners	lower class sinners
free sinners	slave sinners
bourgeoisie sinners	proletarian sinners
educated sinners	uneducated sinners

So Lloyd-Jones expounds: “The gospel of Jesus Christ is needed by everybody. It does not matter whether you have been born in Great Britain or in Japan or in one of the countries of South America; the gospel is needed by *all*. There is no such thing as a ‘Christian nation’, and you are not a Christian because you are born in a so-called Christian country. It does not matter whether people are good or bad, morally speaking; they all need the gospel. So you need to preach it and to talk about it to the most respectable as well as to the most profligate and dissolute. The same gospel! And the learned people and the philosophers stand in exactly the same need of this as the most ignorant person conceivable.”⁷

3. He is eager to preach to them, v. 15.
 - a. Not only was Paul commissioned by God, but he was eager for the cause of God’s gospel; he was enthusiastic under orders and thus delighted in evangelistic proclamation. Here he engages the attention of the Roman believers by expressing his passion, his great zeal for “preaching the gospel” upon his anticipated arrival. Paul was the antithesis of a professional man of religion. The word here is εὐαγγελίζω, euangelizō, which focuses on the *content* of the proclamation rather than the *method*, as κηρύσσω, kerussō, would indicate; cf. 10:5 where both words are used. Likewise Romans focuses upon the content of the gospel rather than the manner of its communication.
 - b. But what does the Apostle mean when he describes his prospective audience as “you also who are in Rome”? Some might feel that he has in mind the evangelization of pagan Rome in general.⁸ However the context strongly suggests

⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 1:1-32, p. 248.

⁸ Douglas Moo, while rejecting this perspective, points out that this is Paul’s normal use of euangelizō, εὐαγγελίζω.

“you” refers to the Christian assembly in the imperial city. The overwhelming proof here is the subsequent doctrinal exposition of the gospel that immediately follows. In other words, Paul relished the preaching of the gospel to those who had formerly believed on hearing the preaching of the gospel.

- c. Application. To evangelize those who have been evangelized may, to some, seem wasted effort, as if attempting to sell refrigerators to Eskimos! However, the substance of Romans indicates that Paul regards this body of gospel doctrine as vital for the ongoing life of the Christian. The gospel is not merely initiatory, as if a necessary requirement for entrance into heaven. The gospel saves for time and eternity, yet it has ongoing and sanctifying significance for the Christian. Having been saved by the gospel, the child of God needs to grow through an expanded understanding of the gospel. In other words the gospel, in which justification before God is obtained, is yet also the ground of progressive sanctification.⁹ The Lord’s Supper is the only *repeatable* Christian ordinance; it is in fact a gospel remembrance feast intended to constantly remind the believer of his reliance upon the gospel and result in his spiritual growth.

⁹ J. C. Ryle makes this point crystal clear in pp. 15-33 of his classic work *Holiness*, and also includes the helpful comments in this regard by Robert Trail, pp. 326-330.