

The Church at Rome

Romans 1:7 - To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 16:5 - Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well beloved Epaenetus, who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ.

In our study concerning “The Doctrine of the Church”, we have been looking at the churches of the New Testament, specifically those which were founded by the apostle Paul and his missionary helpers. In this study, we move on to other churches of the New Testament which were not founded by Paul; to two of these churches which were not founded by him, Paul was inspired of the Holy Spirit to write apostolic epistles, the first being Romans and the second Colossians. In this study, we consider “The Church at Rome”.

Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire, and the largest city in the world of its day. It was to the saints in the churches of this city that Paul addressed his Roman epistle (traditionally, and probably accurately in this case, from the city of Corinth, during his 3 month sojourn in Greece [**Acts 20:2-3**]). He had long desired to preach in the city of Rome, but had been unable to go there (**Rom. 1:10-13; 15:22-23**). However, the Lord revealed to him that he would now be able to go to Rome (and beyond that, to Spain) after first going to Jerusalem (**Rom. 15:24-25,28**). Interestingly and instructively, while the Lord revealed to Paul that he would go to Jerusalem, and then to Rome, before ultimately going to Spain, He didn't reveal the details of how this would occur (i.e., Paul would go to Jerusalem, and there be arrested, and sent to Rome as a prisoner [which is how the book of **Acts** closes, with Paul a prisoner in Rome during what is called “Paul’s first Roman imprisonment”; **Acts 28:16,30-31**]). Let us seek to learn some things concerning “The Church at Rome”.

1. The church at Rome was founded, possibly, by people from Rome who had been saved and baptized at Pentecost (Acts 2)

One of the debates within Christianity for centuries has been who started the church at Rome. One possibility is as follows: we are told that some of the people who were present at Pentecost were people from Rome (**Acts 2:10**). Undoubtedly, some of the 3,000 who were saved, baptized, and continued to serve the Lord (**Acts 2:41-42**) were people from Rome, who then, very likely, returned to the city and started to meet together for Christian fellowship, preaching, etc. The church at Rome probably (though not certainly) developed in this fashion. The day of Pentecost of **Acts 2**, took place (it is thought) about 20 years before Paul’s epistle to the **Romans** was written, hence the church there would probably have been between 15 and 20 years old when the epistle was written.

2. Paul's fellow laborers, the godly married couple Aquila and Priscilla, labored in Rome, founding another church there (Romans 16:3-5)

This may explain why the book of **Romans** is addressed, not to "the church at Rome, but to those in Rome "...called to be saints..." (**Rom. 1:7**). There were now 2 churches in Rome, the older and larger church to which the epistle is sent, and the church that was founded in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, hence the broader addressing of the book. We can learn some things from these matters:

(1) Those who are to be church members are to be "saints"

In other words, it is teaching the doctrine of a "converted church membership" (the truth that only those who have been saved are to be members of a local church) A "saint" is simply a saved person (one who has been "sanctified", or "separated" by salvation out of the great mass of humanity who are lost and without Christ into the group who have been saved by faith in Christ's blood).

(2) The great influence that a godly couple can have

Aquila and Priscilla were a tremendously godly and helpful couple to the apostle Paul. It seems that everywhere they went, they started a church in their house (cf., **I Cor. 16:19**).

3. This church had a world-wide testimony (Rom. 1:8)

4. Paul's epistle to the saints in the churches of Rome is one of the most important books in the Bible

The epistle of **Romans** is a companion epistle to that of **Galatians**, dealing with the same theme (justification by faith; **Rom. 1:17; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:11**), only **Galatians** deals with the subject controversially, while **Romans** sets it forth systematically. **Romans** has been referred to as the greatest systematic treatise on doctrine ever written! The book of **Romans** gives the famous "Roman Road" plan of salvation, through which many of us were saved!

5. The Roman church (or at least one of them) ultimately morphed into the hierarchical and doctrinal monstrosity that became Roman Catholicism

Over the next couple of centuries after the epistle of **Romans** was written by Paul, the Roman church accepted more and more false doctrine (along with great persecution endured by true followers of Christ), until the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized "Christianity" (i.e., Catholicism) and made it the favored (and ultimately the only) religion accepted in the Roman Empire; this took place in the early years of the 4th century. From that point, the Roman church continued (until this very day) accepting more and more false doctrine, becoming the "woman riding on the beast" of **Revelation 17 (Rev. 17:3-7,9,18)**.

Conclusion - The church at Rome was a great church in the New Testament age, but a portion later mutated into a "church" that is non-representative of New Testament Christianity.