

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS (Introduction Part 2)

Message #2

Various Texts

There is a church that received a letter that literally changed the world. Of all the letters written to N.T. churches, none were more impacting in history than the letter written to the church of Rome. Douglas Moo called Romans - "The greatest theological document in the history of Christianity."

Of all the churches in the N.T., there was one church that Paul wanted to visit before he died - Paul longed to visit the church at Rome (**Acts 19:21; Romans 1:10, 13; 15:23**). For years Paul had an intense desire to visit this one church and therefore as we introduce the book of Romans, it is important to understand as much as we can about it.

QUESTION #1 – What was the city of Rome like at the time Paul wrote?

When the books of the New Testament were written, no city on the face of the earth was greater than Rome. It was even more important than Paris of France or New York of the United States or London of England or Moscow of Russia because Rome was the capital city of the world.

Fact #1 - Rome was the most important city in the world.

- 1) Rome was the capital of the whole Roman Empire.
- 2) All roads literally ran to and from Rome.
- 3) Rome totally dominated the entire Mediterranean world.

There was no city more important or magnificent at the time Paul wrote than the city of Rome.

Fact #2 - Rome was the largest city in the world.

Very conservative figures estimate the population to be two million. An inscription from N.T. times was found in 1941 which listed the population at 4.1 million.

Some people hate big cities; not Paul; he was drawn to them by God. Big cities need the Word of God. Big cities need the church of God. Big cities need the Gospel of God. I am convinced that today every big city needs a church that truly knows God's Word and God's doctrines and can unlock it for the people.

Fact #3 - Rome was ideally located and masterfully constructed.

Rome was a spectacular city to see in Paul's day.

- 1) Rome was situated on both sides of the Tiber River.
- 2) Rome was 20 miles in circumference.
- 3) Rome was a city that contained 30 gates.
- 4) Rome contained 420 religious temples.
- 5) Rome was a city that had 5 theaters.
- 6) Rome was a city that contained 2 amphitheaters.
- 7) Rome was a city that contained 7 circuses.
- 8) Rome had 16 marble baths.
- 9) Rome had several palaces and public halls.

Rome was the biggest and best city that man could build. But just like anything man builds or works to achieve, without God it will end up in ruins. Romans tells us our works cannot save us; it will leave us in ruins and that is precisely why we need the Gospel of God.

Fact #4 - Rome was under the control of the Emperor Nero.

When Paul wrote Romans, Nero was the Emperor of Rome. Nero reigned from A.D. 54-68.

(Phase #1) - His peaceful and mild phase from A.D. 54-59.

(Phase #2) - His tyrannical and insane phase from A.D. 60-68.

Severe persecution against Christianity began in A.D. 64. Paul writes Romans in Phase #1.

Any way you slice it, Nero was a maniac. Nero's bizarre personality can be directly linked to his ancestry. When one studies Nero's ancestry, one can soon see that his gross ambition, his immoral sensuality and his evil cruelty were all part of his natural nature. He just lived out his natural pedigree.

Nero's grandfather was a “savage and heartless man.” Otto Kiefer writes: “He (Nero's grandfather) presented beast-hunts which were popular amusements at that time, not only in the circus but in every possible part of the city; he loved the cruel gladiatorial games and conducted them so cruelly that he had to be stopped by a decree of Emperor Augustus” (Kiefer, p. 319).

Nero's father (Domitius Ahenobarbus) was even worse. According to Suetonius, Nero's father was on a tour of the East with Caligula and had one of his own freedmen who was traveling with him put to death for not drinking as much as he thought he should. Nero's dad deliberately killed a child by purposely driving too fast and hitting him. It is said of Nero's dad that if anyone argued with him, he would have his eye removed.

Nero's mother, Agrippina, (the sister of Caligula) was no better than his grandfather or father. Agrippina was highly ambitious, immorally sensual and the mistress of many different men. It is suggested that Nero's own mother had an incestuous relationship with him.

It is no wonder that Nero turned out to be a lust -crazed, power -crazed, bisexual who was given over to "tyranny and cruelty." It is no wonder that Nero ended up marrying a boy named Sporus and carried on one of the most immoral relationships ever recorded in history with Sabina Poppaea.

In many ways, Nero was a sad byproduct of his parents . As Michael Grant said, "Nero's genetic heritage was atrocious" (*The Twelve Caesars*, p. 151). Nero became a savage and heartless man himself. He was immoral and cold . He was a mad cynic who ruled the world when Paul wrote this letter to the Romans. He was a lot like his mom and dad . What should the Christians living in Rome think about Nero? What did Paul think? How should they respond to a government that was so evil? **Paul's answer is given in Romans 13:1-2 . If the Apostle Paul never demeaned Nero, we should never ever demean our president.**

Fact #5 - Rome was "the" major center for religious , polytheistic worship.

Many of the false systems of religions that were headquartered in Rome show up in the book of Acts . Rome had 420 different religious temples devoted to various "gods."

1) **Acts 14:12** - The Greek name is Zeus, the Roman name is Jupiter.

This was supposedly the "god of weather ," the "ruler of all gods."

2) **Acts 14:12** - The Greek name is Hermes, the Roman name is Mercury.

This supposedly was the "god of heralds ."

3) **Acts 17:22** - The Greek name is Ares (from which Areopagus is taken), and the Roman name is Mars (from which Mars Hill is taken).

This supposedly was the "god of war " or the one who protected in war.

4) **Acts 19:21-40** - The Greek name is Artemis, the Roman name is Diana.

This supposedly was the "goddess of fertility ."

It is no wonder that Paul saw such a great opportunity for the Gospel to reach into the heart of heathenism , the city of Rome. There is no place too dark for the power of the Gospel of God.

Fact #6 - Rome was an immoral city.

At the time Paul lived, there was no city on the face of the earth more immoral than Rome. It started in the leadership (Nero) and worked itself right down into most who lived in this depraved society.

Perhaps no better description of this has ever been written than by the famed historian Philip Schaff:

“There is scarcely an age in the history of the world in which so many and so hideous vices disgraced the throne, as in the period from Tiberius to Domitian ... the cruelty and voluptuousness of Tiberius; the ferocious madness of Caius Caligula, who had men tortured, beheaded, or sawed in pieces for his amusement, who seriously meditated the butchery of the whole senate, raised his horse to the dignity of consul and priest, and crawled under the bed in a storm; the bottomless vileness of Nero, 'the inventor of crime,' who poisoned or murdered his preceptors ..., who in sheer wantonness set fire to Rome, and then burnt innocent Christians for it as torches in his gardens ... the swinish gluttony of Vitellius, who consumed millions of money in mere eating; the refined wickedness of Domitian, who, more a cat than a tiger, amused himself most with the torments of the dying ..., the shameless revelry of Commodus with his hundreds of concubines, ferocious passion for butchering men and beasts in the arena; the mad villainy of Heliogabalus, who raised the lowest men to the highest dignities, dressed himself in women's clothing, married a boy, in short inverted all the laws of nature and decency ...”

Rome was a godless and immoral city and culture. What could possibly change it? **The power of the Gospel of God!** If ever there were a place that needed the Gospel of God, it was Rome !

It has always been a question among the historians as to what caused the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." Let me give you seven reasons why the Roman Empire fell:

The immediate cause was the Germanic invasions of the 5th Century. But how did the most powerful empire reach a level of conquer ability in 4 centuries?

- 1) An empire committed to an uncontrollable, immoral lifestyle.
- 2) Leadership that was corrupt and monstrous.
- 3) Heavy taxation and taxation laws especially over the lower classes.
- 4) A lack of enthusiasm from the populous to defend their empire.
- 5) Diluted military comprised of foreigners and mercenaries.
- 6) An avalanche of barbaric attacks from outside enemies.
- 7) The conquering of major cities.

One thing that has always been listed was the uncontrollable immorality that was promoted from the leadership down. When leadership is immoral and promotes people to be immoral, it is just a matter of time until history is repeated - that nation declines and eventually falls .

Notice Paul alludes to immorality (**Romans 1:24-28**) but he then leaps into heavy theology about God. Just harping against sin will never save anyone - presenting God's Word saves people. **It is not a picket or protest march that will save a morally corrupt world, it is an accurate presentation of the Gospel of God.**

QUESTION #2 – Who founded the church of Rome?

Fact #1 - The church could not have been founded directly by the Apostle Paul.

It is clear that Paul had never been to Rome to preach or teach and he was looking forward to the time when he would be able to fulfill his great desire to go there (**Romans 1:10-15**).

Fact #2 - The church could not have been founded by the Apostle Peter.

The Roman Catholic Church claims the Apostle Peter was the founding father of the church. However, there are at least three Biblical reasons why it could not be Peter:

- 1) Paul would never interfere with the ministry of another apostle (**Romans 15:20; II Corinthians 10:16**).
- 2) Paul knew many people in Rome and he certainly would have said something to or about Peter if he had been there (**Romans 16**).
- 3) Had Peter founded the church, Paul would have never been questioned by the Jews about the meaning of Christianity when he finally arrived in Rome (**Acts 28:22**).

The church was not founded directly by Paul or Peter.

Fact #3 - The church could have been founded by Jews who were in Jerusalem who did respond to the Gospel at Pentecost some 20 years earlier (**Acts 2:10**).

- 1) No other major city in the Roman Empire had a church founded by new converts.
- 2) If the Jews founded the church, why would Paul have to explain Christianity to Jews? (**Acts 28:17, 22**)

Fact #4 - The church probably was founded by Gentile believers who had been influenced by the ministry of Paul.

Gentile Christians were saved everywhere Paul went. This would explain why there is such a massive list of Latin and Greek names found in **Romans 16**. **Many came to faith under Paul's ministry at other places - they moved to Rome and started a church.**

QUESTION #3 – Was the church at Rome comprised more of Jews or Gentiles?

Fact #1 - There are definite references to Jewish people (**2:16-17; 3:1, 9; 4:1**). There are also definite references to God's relationship with the Jewish people (**Romans 9-11**).

Fact #2 - There are several references to the Gentiles, and Rome would have had a vast majority of Gentiles in the city (**Romans 1:5, 6, 13; 11:13; 15:9-12, 15-16**).

Although there were some Jewish believers in the church at Rome, more than likely the majority were Gentile believers. One of the main reasons for this is because Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome (**Acts 18:2**) about 10 years before Paul wrote this letter to the Romans (A.D. 49).

QUESTION #4 – What is the theme of Romans?

The powerful theme of Romans which has been so greatly used by God to shake the entire world is this: **God's way of righteousness for all of mankind - from heathen sinners to religious moralists, for Jews and Gentiles - is found only and totally by faith in Jesus Christ.** Most commentators believe this theme is clearly stated in **Romans 1: 16-17**. **Romans is the first Bible book to actually explain the Gospel.**

A relationship with Jesus Christ by simple faith is the only way to righteousness in the sight of God. Without a relationship with Christ, you cannot ever be righteous in the sight of God.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you have. Without a relationship with Jesus Christ, you cannot ever be right with God or righteous in His sight. **This relationship is developed by faith in Christ and not by our human works (i.e. Romans 3:26-28).**

QUESTION #5 – How does the book of Romans unfold?

Heading #1 - Paul's introduction to Romans. (**1:1-17**)

1. Introduction of Paul. (1:1)
2. Introduction of the Gospel of God. (**1:2-6**)
3. Introduction of this letter's recipients. (**1:7**)
4. Introduction of Paul's personal concern. (**1:8-15**)
5. Introduction of Paul's powerful theme. (**1:16-17**)

Heading #2 - All humanity is guilty before God. (**1:18-3:20**)

1. All heathen sinners are guilty before God. (**1:18-32**)
2. All moral people are guilty before God. (**2:1-16**)
3. All religious people are guilty before God. (**2:17-3:8**)
4. All the world is guilty before God. (**3:9-20**)

Heading #3 - God's righteousness is only found in Jesus Christ. (3:21-5:21)

1. God's righteousness is clearly defined. (3:21-31)
2. God's righteousness is practically illustrated. (4:1-25)
3. God's righteousness is personally applied. (5:1-11)
4. God's imputed righteousness is contrasted with God's imputed guilt. (5:12-21)

Heading #4 - Every believer is completely identified with Jesus Christ. (6:1-8:39)

1. This identification delivers a believer from all sin. (6:1-23)
2. This identification delivers a believer from God's law. (7:1-25)
3. This identification gives a believer God's Spirit. (8:1-39)

Heading #5 - God's righteousness is still associated with Israel. (9:1-11:36)

1. Israel's present relationship with God is perfectly consistent with God's sovereignty. (9:1-33)
2. Israel's guilt is perfectly consistent with God's righteousness. (10:1-21)
3. Israel's present condition is perfectly consistent with God's program. (11:1-36)

Heading #6 - God's righteousness is to be demonstrated in the Christian life. (12:1-15:13)

1. God's righteousness is demonstrated through Spiritual gifts. (12:1-8)
2. God's righteousness is demonstrated through Spiritual attitudes. (12:9-15:13)

Heading #7 - Paul's conclusion to Romans. (15:14-16:27)

1. Paul talks about his personal ministry. (15:14-33)
2. Paul sends his personal greetings. (16:1-16)
3. Paul gives his personal conclusion. (16:17-27)

Romans is a well organized, highly systematized letter. As we journey through it, it is our prayer that God will cement in our minds and hearts **the righteousness of God that is only found by faith in Jesus Christ.**