

Rome was the capital of the world in the days of Christ's first time on earth. Caesar, the Roman emperor was both absolute monarch and god of the Roman Empire which stretched from the British Isles in the west to Babylon in the east to the borders of Germany on the north and across northern Africa to the south. The land of Palestine was under Roman occupation and rule those days and the Roman governor, Pilate, tried and sentenced Jesus to crucifixion. After the Lord rose from the dead and ascended to God's right hand in Heaven He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the disciples and all subsequent believers. In the years following, the gospel was spread world wide by the disciples and others who had heard it in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Paul wasn't there but both Jews and Gentile proselytes from Rome were, Acts 2:10. (Proselytes were Gentiles that had adopted the Jewish faith.) So there was a thriving assembly of believers in the metropolis of Rome before Paul was even saved. After Paul was miraculously saved he was appointed by the Lord to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Though he preached Christ immediately after his salvation he spent at least fourteen years alone with God in Arabia before embarking on his first missionary journey. By the time he wrote this epistle to the saints in Rome he had traveled extensively throughout Asia Minor (now Turkey) and through southeastern Europe preaching the gospel and establishing assemblies everywhere. But he had not been to Rome, and desired earnestly to visit the believers there and impart the special ministry he had received as an apostle directly from the Lord. They were eternally saved by grace through faith in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ but there is much more than simply initial salvation. Blessings, such as eternal peace of heart, victory over indwelling sin and opportunities to sacrificially serve the Lord, were revealed by Paul in this letter to them. Old Testament Jewish faith is revealed to be inadequate and is completely replaced by Paul's Gospel revealed in this epistle to the Romans. It is foundational. All the rest of Paul's ministry is built upon what is revealed in this epistle to the Romans. Not that others had not already heard what is contained in Romans directly from Paul's lips, he preached it everywhere. The letters he wrote to other places where he had already preached follow up the gospel they had already heard from him in person. But he hadn't yet brought it personally to Rome. God led him by the Spirit to write it down in the epistle we call "Romans" for their immediate benefit and for all believers, after Paul was martyred, for us!

Romans was written from Corinth where Paul was preaching and establishing an assembly in a rather hostile atmosphere. See Acts 18. In Romans 16 we learn of

some of the Romans and some of the Corinthians by name. These are real people, believers like us, living day to day lives with families, jobs, neighbors, problems, trials, Jewish opposition, a generally intolerant government and an assembly of those of like faith with interrelationships to nourish, cherish and enjoy.

Paul starts right at the very beginning, introducing himself and the Lord he served. He establishes his authority and calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ (their Savior and Lord). He was not only personally called by the Lord but was separated to present the Gospel of God, the good news God delights to have told abroad. Next Paul presents the Lord He represents. God's Son. Jesus Christ.

Our Lord. One who is eternal who became (was made) something He wasn't before, a Man. Jesus is a real human being with flesh and blood (born of a woman) humanly speaking. And He is, as a Man, a descendent of David therefore with right to the throne of David. He is the long promised King. But He is more. Far more. He is now declared, (announced, marked out) by the Holy Spirit as the Son of God. How so? By His unique feat accomplished by no other man, resurrection from among the dead. He is God the Son. He did not become "Son of God" upon his birth as some attempt to reason. He is the Eternal Son. But He became a Man, Son of David.

Luke 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

[Note, shall be "called Son of the Highest" not "become Son of the Highest."]

Galatians 4:4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

2Timothy 2:8 Remember Jesus Christ raised from among [the] dead, of [the] seed of David, according to my glad tidings,(DBY)

Hebrews 1:1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

1John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

This is an essential, basic truth held dear by every believer.

Paul then declares his apostleship, his commission and mission received with grace from the Lord. This calling was not an honor Paul deserved or had earned but pure

grace from God. Paul was not invincible, or a god, though incredibly gifted, but a mere believer like each of us, constrained to live his life and to serve by obedience of faith. Paul's will and ours is voluntarily motivated by our godly response to God's calling, neither subhuman creatures being driven by instinct implanted by God nor fearful human beings acting in obedience to a set of decrees in order to attain eternal life or retain favor with God. We are given grace and spiritual gift (apostleship in Paul's case) for obedience of faith. Spiritual gifts given are referred to as grace

Paul's calling was to bring Jesus' Name to all nations not just the Jews. What a turnaround from his rabid persecution of the Church for it's calling out Jews from traditional Judaism. He states the Roman believers were among other Gentiles called. God had not skipped over them because of the Emperor's subjugation of the Jews. Nor had they been called because of the immense power and dominion that God had granted their nation. They weren't unique to God (any more than each of us is unique to God) but their faith was spoken of throughout the world.* What a testimony! So Paul warmly greets them and salutes their calling to be saints (sanctified persons). And blesses them with grace and peace from God. As an Apostle he could do this as God's spokesman, but can't we bless one another too? Saying "God bless you" should not be an idle platitude but a solemn prayer calling down God the Father's blessing upon the one you are moved to bless.

Paul had not been to Rome although he fervently desired to go there to impart to them "some spiritual gift," some ministry of Christ profitable for their souls. Several times in Romans he mentions prayer that he might be enabled to visit them and gives here four reasons for this desire.

To establish them

"I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye

may be established." Teaching is not for intellectual stimulation and satisfaction but to lay the solid foundation of truth in Christ and to be built up upon it.

For mutual comfort and encouragement

"that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." Encouragement in the faith common to all believers and the shared experiences of God's loving provision, care and blessing for each.

To have fruit among them

"that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles." His reward for his work was to see fruit of the Spirit and Unity of the Spirit among the believers. He wanted nothing of personal recognition, power, prominence and position in the Church.

These three outcomes correspond to the results expected from prophesying. Build up, stir up, bind up.

1Corinthians 14:3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

And he would preach the Gospel to them

"as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." Being believers they did not need the gospel to be saved again. But Paul's gospel entails much more than that. It is all of the Good News he had been given directly from the Lord to reveal to all believers the blessings that are freely ours by the grace of God. Paul jumps the gun a little here, as if he cannot wait until he gets there. He writes it all down and sends it to them. The truth they received in this letter God also preserved for us, truth we would not have if Paul had just preached there in person. For Romans is a rather formal, well organized treatise on the Gospel. It appropriately is first epistle in the order of our Bibles although not the first written by Paul. Read on! Soak it in. Let it do its work in your heart. And soar.

By Ron Canner, June 27, 2007

NOTE: Ironically the "faith" of Rome is still known world around, but it bears little resemblance to the faith Paul gave them to keep. One wonders if the Vatican ever seriously reads the letter written from "Saint Paul" directly to the saints at Rome. They would rent their robes if his words had any more weight for them than an ancient, sacred religious relic rather than the living, inspired sharp two-edged sword that is the word of God. R