Paul’s Letter to the Romans

Introduction and Chapter 1

We begin a new study, and this will be the letter Paul wrote to the Christian Communities in Rome. Paul wrote this letter while he was wintering in the city of Corinth, probably between AD 57 to 59 (or within a year or two either way) This could , then have been on Paul's second trip to Corinth as we had read about on our study of 1st and 2nd Corinthians. Paul had not been to Rome, but he knew much about the Roman Christian communities, both Gentile and Jew, he knew about the ongoing conflicts of Gentile believer and Jewish believer, and was close friends to a married couple who left Rome, Aquila and Priscilla, and who joined him in Corinth and who probably gave him a rundown on the conditions there.

So as little as we know about the Roman Christian Churches, it seems we know even less about whether or not there were any active Apostles who went there, (again, as far as we know); so, where did these Christian communities come from? One thing we know, the Gentile Church met secretly in small home Church settings and/or underground Churches because of the despotic Emperors from Claudius to Nero and beyond were arresting Christians wherever they could find them and Nero was known to have taken live Christian prisoners set them on fire and used them for his garden lamps. The Jewish Christian Church met in either the synagogue or home groups for the same reason.

As we review this history, we should look back at Jesus ministry and note the Roman officials who crossed Jesus’ path and some came to Faith in Christ which they would have taken back home to Rome when their service time was up. And remember, when they were saved so was their household. So a Gentile Church began to emerge in Rome at an early date. We also have Jewish converts who may have been businessmen who for business purposes resettled for a time in Rome thus the rising up of the Jewish Christian Church. This could have occurred from about the very early 30's AD to the mid to late 50's AD therefore within 20 + years there were quite a few folks. And also remember there was a purge of the Jerusalem Church during the late 30’s and early 40’s which moved a lot of disciples out of Jerusalem, and on throughout the whole of the Roman empire. So there was early movement of new Christians throughout the empire and I am sure some were able to establish churches wherever they went.

The City of Rome was the capitol of the Roman Empire, with about 1 million or more in population, and about the same size as Corinth and Ephesus, and as such, was the collecting ground of many nationalities and with those nationalities their various religions with their various temples and other places of worship. But Rome had a religion based largely on initial Greek beliefs which they adopted as their own, and on Emperor worship. All the other religions had no problem with this except for the Gentile Christian and Jewish Christian hence the going after them. So in this time period Nero reigned from AD 54 to AD 68 after taking over from Claudius. And, by the way, they would take on the royal name of Caesar, so when Paul, a few years later, was to be taken to Caesar it would have been Nero.

Now, the Gentile Christians would have their belief in Jesus and His Saving Grace, whereas the Jewish Christians believed in Jesus, but still followed the Law thus there was a rift between the two and Paul will use this letter to address the rift, and various tenets that he felt needed to be addressed and corrected. I do believe that with the various travels of the secondary believers like Aquila and Priscilla some corrections were being made, but many misconceptions remained. But the question was and still is, where did they get their belief standards and formats to begin with?

A] Romans 1: 1 through 7; (read)

1] "*Paul a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the Gospel of God, which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Who was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with Power according to the Spirit of Holiness by the resurrection from the dead."*

To begin with, the first thing to note, The Apostle Paul never met a comma he couldn't use. Those 4 verses are actually one sentence.

Now the first point in this commentary is, few if any had any ideas who Paul was, except for what Aquila and Priscilla may have mentioned to them. So, Paul has to introduce himself, and give his credentials. The founder of these Christian groups may have known Jesus's disciples but Paul was not one of them, so he would be a virtual stranger to them and that being the case, who was he to write this letter, to correct them in their Faith and instruct them?

He then proceeds to introduce himself as a 'bondservant' of Jesus Christ. A bond servant was a person who had a debt he could not pay so he was bonded to the debt holder until the debt was paid in full. He then states he was called to be an Apostle, and he is 'separated out’ expressly to proclaim the Good News of God.

We recall that Paul/Saul was a Pharisaic student and then Pharisee, most zealous in his studies, who tormented the Christian movement until Jesus CALLED him out on the Damascus Road, and did separate him for this particular calling. Now that Good News of God as promised through the prophets, regarding the birth the Son of God, and through the death and resurrection of the God/man person who was Jesus; for the salvation of man.

2] "*Through Him we have received Grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His Name, among whom, you also are the called of Jesus Christ."*

Now, for those of you who were here when we went through the Book of Acts, we learned that Paul did, after a stuttering start, rise through the ranks quickly to become a lead Apostle. As the Apostles in Jerusalem sent him out with Barnabas in the lead, but because Paul was a learned man, he soon took the lead from Barnabas. So once he started, through his diligence, fearless dedication and hard work, God's Grace was upon him, it was he who had a most amazing evangelistic ministry. He points out that those he writes to are also called out.

3] *"To all who are in Rome, Beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Paul calls them Beloved of God, and they were. When one stops to think about it, for the years of having to endure vicious despots who always threatened to jail or kill them, yet they were sticking it out. That is special, isn't it? Think about it, how long could you endure that kind of threat?????

Grace and Peace, What a wonderful greeting. Grace being: ‘God's unmerited favor’, and peace: ‘that is God's comforting peace through the trials’.

B] Romans 1: 8 through 16; (read)

1] “*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”*

To begin with, he tells them that their faith in trying times is known all over the known world. When you think that, starting from Rome, heading east through western Asia, and throughout Palestine through down to Egypt, the Romans were riding roughshod over the Jews, and the Christians; and here these folks were, right at the dragon's heart living with danger and yet growing.

2] "*For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you."*

Paul has the uncanny knack of making a large sentence out of a small one. Here all he says is, first, God knows all Paul is doing and would attest to the truth in what Paul is telling them; second, that Paul continuously prays for them and in these prayers, he always asks God to open the door that he might go to see them. Paul has an amazing prayer life as we know; he is in prayer for all those churches he has planted. This IS Faith in action as Paul has the heart to bring his Gospel "good news of Jesus Christ" to the folks in Rome and God will in his time will fulfill Paul's desire.

3] "*For I long to see you that I may impart to some spiritual gift so that you may be established, that is that I may be encouraged together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me."*

One thing I see here is Paul's longing. He has this intense desire to take the message of Salvation to all the places he could, and Rome was one of them. Now from what I see with the various scholars who comment on these writings, I have not seen any remark about the lack of Apostolic training or even teaching that these Roman believers had or had not gotten. Yes they probably met Jesus or were impacted by Him, but in this Apostolic age the laying on of hands and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, (That is the ‘gift’ Paul; wants to bring to them,) had not come to these Roman believers as yet, as far as we know, and this is what Paul yearned for. Another thing to note, Paul is not forcing himself on them, he says it is for the benefit of BOTH of us. This would be a mutual give and take if you will. It is his faith and their faith that will make this thing work.

4] "*Now I do not want you to be unaware brethren, that I had often planned to come to you, (but was hindered until now.) That I might have some fruit among you also, just as among other gentiles."*

Well, we know that Paul did want to go many places but what this particular hindrance was, we don't know, and the one thing we do know is, aside from wanting, he had planned to go many places, but Paul did expressly rely on God to open those doors. But, sometimes that is when God would step in and therefore prevent him from going. So, what is this 'fruit' Paul speaks of ?

We have discussed the nature of the Roman Christian experience and although there may not have been Apostolic interaction with the Roman believers, there was belief but little establishment. Paul did find real believers in his travels but even though they believed, their belief was incomplete, so Paul would lay hands on them and complete their belief with the giving of the Holy Spirit, With the Holy Spirit came the 'gifts’ and from the gifts came the fruit. Can we be believers without bearing fruit? That would be the question.'

5] "*I am a debtor to both Greek and barbarian, both to wise and to unwise. So as much as is in me I am ready to preach the Gospel to you who are in Rome also."*

The better word here is 'obligation'. God had laid on Paul an obligation to take the Gospel to the Jews first, but then to all mankind. The barbarian would be all that were not Jew nor Greek. He also means to take the gospel to the learned man and the unlearned. Paul says, he IS ready, willing and able.

C] Romans 1: 16 and 17; (read)

1] "*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The Just shall live by faith"." (Habakkuk 2:4)*

Have you ever noticed sports stars or well-known figures who were purported to be believers when asked to what they owed their success and they would point skyward and attribute it to the "man upstairs". They never could say 'God'. Paul is saying, ‘I am ready to preach this good news to you because I am not ashamed to do so.’ There is a zeal in his approach, isn’t there? His ministry was to the Jew first, because that was the original pecking order, and as the Jew turned away, he was obligated to go to the Greek (or non-Jew or Gentile). Now he states, that this is for both, because the Gospel is to those who believe whether Jew or non-Jew. It is strictly Faith friends. So even in his introduction he is laying some ground rules.

D] Romans 1: 18 through 25; (read)

1] "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them."*

Oh, here we have Paul in his lawyerly best. First the 'wrath of God' is just that, His feeling, not nescessarily an action, about the rampant sin throughout the world. There is judgment coming, and has come with Jesus. My guess is a non-sympathetic attitude toward the turmoil these folks are facing every day in Rome.

There were, in that world, many represented religions in Rome and even Emperor worship and all of these religions are a direct slap at the face of God by their nature. In other words, folks know who God is but have chosen to reject Him. They also have made the choice to restrict Christians and Jews and their beliefs.

2] “*For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood, by the things that are made, even His eternal Power, and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."*

We can see the visible creation of God, everybody can see this, but the world seems to have closed their collective eyes when it comes to acknowledging God IN His creation. Friends, Every culture seems to have an innate sense of something out there greater than themselves. That IS why there are so many religions with idols and images. Yet when God is presented through the Jews, they all reject Him. This is what Paul is telling the Christians. What he is doing is setting up the doctrine of God. First things first. God IS.

3] "*Professing to be wise they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like a corruptible man---and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."*

Remember the Greek wise men, and all their sayings, and there is the Roman counterparts, professing to be wise but really spouting things out of their ignorance. And as Paul says, look around you at all the statues and Icon of Apollo, Diana and animal gods. Goodness! the place was full of them.

4] "*Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in their lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies, among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, Who is Blessed forever. Amen."*

Because of their abhorrent disregard of the reality of God, God did allow them to follow after all their baser instincts, and completely degrade themselves in their pantheistic worship. Friends, we also have this continuing movement today, don't we? And we also have some churches or religious leaders, actually accepting many of these vile practices in the Church.

But Paul set the table, of what their reality is, what the realities are they were living in, and in doing so, he will now make them see what their actual relationship with this world is.

E] Romans 1: 26 through 32; (read)

1] "*For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men leaving the natural use of the woman burning in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."*

WOW!!! Does this touch a chord??? DEAR friends, Paul bounces this around here and in a couple of his other letters, and there is NO EXCUSE for any Church to condone this aberrant behavior. He is talking about homosexuality, and because in Leviticus 18, God absolutely detests it and has a law against it, Paul then revisits it here because it is so rampant in this age and society.

2] "*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind , to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality , wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; They are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, , undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful, who knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only the same but also approve of those who practice them."*

Gee all in one sentence! But Paul then lists about every known sin that these people practice, every debasement, they engage in, and stop to think, what is he aiming at? For a refresher think about the world just before the rise of Noah, or the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot was living.

Friends Paul is telling us, and we can see it for ourselves, civilizations seem to always want to push natural boundaries, don't they? Every culture sets out knowing there is a supreme being, the American Indian, the Asian cultures, African cultures, all know there is one, but we who KNOW of the living God, have this insatiable need to remake God into our own image and rewrite His law so we make ourselves justified in our own eyes.

All of this going on then and is going on today and we are seemingly unmindful of God's judgment. We think we can handle it all, and in acting on this presumption, we constantly get it wrong. We actually, many times, screw things up further.