

# **An Introduction To Romans**

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Romans the book . . . . .	3
1.2	What was Rome the City like in AD 57 . . . . .	4
1.3	What was the Church in Rome like? . . . . .	4
1.4	What did most Romans believe in AD 57 . . . . .	5
1.5	What was happening in Rome at this time . . . . .	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Commentary</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1	Romans 16:1-2 Phoebe . . . . .	8
2.2	Romans 1:1-7 . . . . .	8
2.2.1	Romans 1:1 . . . . .	9
2.2.2	Romans 1:2-4 . . . . .	10
2.2.3	Romans 1:5-7 . . . . .	11
2.2.4	What can we conclude from this . . . . .	12
2.3	Romans 1:8-15 . . . . .	12
2.3.1	Romans 1:8 . . . . .	13
2.3.2	Romans 1:9-10 . . . . .	13
2.3.3	Romans 1:11-12 . . . . .	13
2.3.4	Romans 1:13 . . . . .	14
2.3.5	Romans 1:14-17 . . . . .	14

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Romans the book

In Acts we read...

*(11) "Take courage, Paul. For as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome"*

*(Acts 23:11, NRSV).*

Romans is Paul's letter to the Roman church, laying the foundation for his upcoming visit. Unknown to Paul he would visit and testify in Rome but not in the way he anticipated; he would go to Rome as a prisoner chained to a Roman guard.

Romans is often seen as an intimidating book, its long, its detailed and complex. However we should remember that it was not written as an academic treatise but was written as a letter to ordinary people: shop keepers, slaves and tradesmen. They could understand it and so can we. However the original recipients had an advantage over us; they lived and worked in the same time and culture as Paul and would quickly understand his allusions and references which may be lost on us. To fully understand Romans we need to understand the context it was written in, only then will we fully understand the nature of what Paul was writing.

Romans as a letter exists in ancient texts in a long form, which is what we have in our bibles and a shorter version which corresponds to the

first fourteen chapters. The last two chapters are specific to the Roman Church and what appears to have happened is that the long version was the original but the letter was so important that a shortened version was sent to other Churches. Romans is one of the seven letters of Paul of which there is no serious argument about who wrote it.

Paul wrote Romans around AD 56-57 when he was in Corinth living in the house of Gaius. Paul had taken a collection in Macedonia and Acaia for the poorer members of the Church in Jerusalem and intended to take the collection to Jerusalem before visiting Rome (Rom 15:25-26). Paul was planning a new missionary journey and he saw Rome as the natural starting point for his next missionary journey to Spain because, at this time, Rome was the western most Church in the world and Paul was hoping for support from the Roman Church. However Paul could expect little support if they were preoccupied bickering over minor issues such as dietary observances. Even worse was the fact that if these issues were being raised then it suggested they had not grasped the full impact of the gospel at all, Paul hoped to correct these distractions with this letter, refocus the Church onto the transforming resurrection of Christ and look forward to spreading the gospel to Spain, which was the end of the known world in Roman times.

Most of Paul's letters were written for specific churches that Paul had been personally involved with and they usually address specific problems in the church. Romans is unusual in that when it was written Paul had never visited Rome and had little influence on the young church. Because Paul had little contact with the Roman Church his letter to Romans appears less personal than his other letters but it is the most detailed explanation of his beliefs.

## 1.2 What was Rome the City like in AD 57

What was the city of Rome like in AD 57?

Rome in AD 57 probably had a population of about one million people. About half of the population were slaves and most of the rest were poor workers. There was a small number of wealthy residents and not a lot in between. About 40% of the city's land was taken up with imperial palaces, temples and government buildings. Everyone else lived in the squalid, cramped and dirty tenement blocks that made up the remaining 60% of the city. The population density of the poor areas of Rome in AD 57 is thought to have been about double that of Manhattan today - and Americans live in Skyscrapers!

## 1.3 What was the Church in Rome like?

Paul had never been to Rome, he did not found the Church and we do not know who founded the church in Rome, some claim it was Peter but there is no evidence for this, we simply don't know.

In Rome there was a growing gulf between the Jews and the Christians. The Christians were originally seen as a sect within Judaism. Many Christians saw the fact that the bulk of

Judaism had rejected Christ as a sign that God had rejected the Jews. Paul wants to correct that view as he sees Jesus has fulfilled and completed Judaism rather than abolishing it.

Although the Church in Rome contained a mix of Jews and gentiles it is quite likely that even the gentiles had quite a good understanding of the scriptures. During this period a high portion of the people who attended the synagogues were actually not Jews or even Jewish converts but people who were curious about the Jewish god. Historical studies suggest that in some cities 40% of attendees were non Jewish. This is hinted at in Paul's comment in Acts 13 where he refers to these people as "God fearers".

*(13) Then Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. John, however, left them and returned to Jerusalem;*

*(14) but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.*

*(15) After the reading of the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent them a message, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, give it."*

*(16) So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak: "You Israelites, and others who fear God, listen.*

*(Acts 13, NRSV)*

This also explains the apparent contradiction that Paul always stated that his mission was to the gentiles but he talks of going to the synagogues first when he arrived in a new City; Paul was probably going to the synagogue and talking to gentile "God fearers" in the Jewish synagogues. This would make sense as the

“God fearers” who already attended the synagogue would know that a Messiah was prophesied in the old testament, they were clearly interested and would be a fertile segment of society for Paul’s message. Jewish belief was that the coming of the Messiah would usher in a new age, a God given alternative to the current age. Hence there was no need to explain to Jews or the “God fearers” about the Messiah, the issue for Paul was to convince these people that the resurrected Jesus was the Messiah they expected and explain that we were in a transitional age, not yet the age to come. The “God fearers” already knew the theory, Paul’s job was to explain how Christ fulfilled their Jewish beliefs.

What was day to day life like in the Church?

The Church in Rome was small and would have consisted of people meeting in small groups in private houses. Most Jews, and it is believed most Christians, lived in the poor areas. Paul greets five specific households in chapter 16 which suggests that there might have been five distinct Christian groups meeting in Rome. A typical household meeting would hold about 20-30 people so the total Church in Rome could well have been about 100-150 people in a city of a million.

The Church would have had prophesy:

*(8) The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him.*

*(9) He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.*

*(Acts 21, NRSV)*

They broke bread together:

*(7) On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended*

*to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.*

*(8) There were many lamps in the room upstairs where we were meeting.*

*(9) A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer.*

*(Acts 20, NRSV)*

They were meeting in an upstairs room, maybe above a shop. We also learn from this that Paul gave very long talks and people fell asleep even in his sermons!

Christianity was the first religion to have no temples, no priesthood and no sacrifices. This had further implications. The tithe in Judaism was used to support the temples, festivals, Levites and the poor, with most of those abolished there was also no tithe, hence Paul made a special collection to take to the poor in Jerusalem. The tithe is scriptural - but its not Christian. However it has remained the favourite topic of many preachers.

## 1.4 What did most Romans believe in AD 57

The Jews were a small segment of society in Rome, probably 2-5% of the population.

What did the average Roman believe?

But first a question: Who do the following statements refer to?

- Divine Lord.
- Son of God.
- Saviour of the world.
- Whose birth is hailed as Good news.
- Who has brought peace on earth.

They all refer to the emperor Nero. The major religion in the Roman empire at this time was the deification of the emperor himself. Nero was one emperor who encouraged this belief. It is important to remember this when reading Romans because some of what Paul discusses in Romans is not just new and radical but potentially treasonous. Paul claims these phrases for Christ, effectively saying that Nero's claim on these titles is false, a dangerous claim to make. Roman emperors claimed to bring peace on earth but it was a peace enforced through military conquest, violence and enforced slavery. Roman violence had extended so far as to kill Jesus on the cross. The resurrection showed that the God Paul was preaching was above Roman authority and above the power of the emperor. The resurrected Jesus was God and the emperor a liar. When Paul said "Jesus is lord" anyone living in Rome would immediately understand the implication that Nero is not the lord he claims to be.

## 1.5 What was happening in Rome at this time

What was happening in this period of history? Roman rulers of this period were some of the most bizarre in history, some were just bad, others were murderously insane. Nero was one of the worst. A short summary of some events going on in Rome at this time, these all happened within a few years of Paul writing his letter.

Time line

- AD 49 - Claudius bans the Jews from Rome, the exact date is unsure, Priscilla and Aquila who are mentioned several times in the new testament leave Rome. Suetonius says the Jews were expelled because of disturbances at the instigation of

Chrestus which is probably a garbled reference to claims over Jesus as the Messiah. [4]

- AD 54 - Claudius is murdered and Nero becomes emperor. Priscilla and Aquila probably return to Rome at this time.
- AD 57 - Paul writes Romans when in Corinth while he is staying with Gaius.
- AD 59 - Nero has his own mother murdered.
- AD 60 - Paul arrives in Rome as a prisoner.
- AD 62 - Nero divorces his first wife, Octavia, and then has her murdered, you can't be too careful!
- AD 64 - Great fire in Rome, Nero blames the Christians and begins the persecution. Many believe Nero started the fire himself to clear space for his new palace. Paul was probably executed as part of this wave of persecution.
- AD 67 - Nero has a young man - Sporus - castrated and then marries him because he looks like his dead wife.
- AD 70 - Jewish revolt and Rome destroys the temple in Jerusalem.

Nero wasn't a God - he was insane! These were dangerous and volatile times and in this atmosphere Paul sits down in Corinth and dictates his letter to the Church in Rome.

From Acts, Romans and Suetonius we have good idea of how early Christianity developed in Rome, but we don't know who started it. The early believers were amongst the Jews and the gentiles who attended the synagogue, Jews and the "God fearers". The ensuing debates and as Suetonius says, disturbances, within the Jewish community prompted Claudius to expel

the Jews. It appears that the debate had got rather heated! With the Jews expelled Christianity became a predominantly gentile religion in Rome. When the Jewish Christians returned under Nero they found themselves in the minority amongst the Christian population which had grown during their absence and conflicts arose over issues such as diet. These conflicts are one of the issues Paul wants to address.

# Chapter 2

## Commentary

### 2.1 Romans 16:1-2 Phoebe

We start our introduction to Romans at the beginning and in this case the beginning is in chapter 16!

*(1) I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae,*

*(2) so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.*

*(Romans 16, NRSV)*

Who was Phoebe, why was she important and why were we starting with her?. Phoebe is a gentile name so most likely she was a Greek, gentile convert. Phoebe was a deacon in the church in Cenchreae in Corinth; Cenchreae was a sea port near Corinth on the eastern side of the isthmus of Corinth. Paul had founded the Church in Corinth earlier as outlined in Acts chapter 18 and later Paul used Corinth as a base, staying with one of the early converts called Gaius. There were probably several Christian groups in the area and one was in the port of Cenchreae and that is where we find Phoebe. Phoebe was clearly a well respected person in the Church and trusted by Paul. Paul describes her as a “benefactor” so she may have been financially better off than

the average church member, she may have been a trader. Paul is commending Phoebe to the Roman Church because Phoebe had the job of delivering the letter to the Roman Church. That would entail carrying the letter to Rome, reading the letter, explaining the letter and answering questions on the letter. Furthermore the Church (Ekklesia) in Rome was not a building or one place “The Church” refers to the Christians themselves and all the Christians in Rome, wherever they met, would have considered themselves part of the Church in Rome. So Phoebe would have toured around Rome presenting the letter from Paul to small groups of people meeting in homes and shops. Its interesting to ponder the thought that when the first people heard the letter to the Romans it was being read by a Greek lady, probably in a small house in the poorer area of Rome.

### 2.2 Romans 1:1-7

Lets look at the first few verses of Romans.

*(1) Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*

*(2) which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,*

*(3) the gospel concerning his Son, who*

*was descended from David according to the flesh*

*(4) and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,*

*(5) through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,*

*(6) including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,*

*(7) To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*(Romans 1, NRSV)*

In the original text verses 1-7 form one long sentence. Paul starts by explaining who he is and by describing his role in spreading the gospel:

### 2.2.1 Romans 1:1

*(1) Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*

*(Romans 1, NRSV)*

*A servant* Actually the word is slave which more clearly reflects the fact that Paul belongs to the master and doesn't just work for him. Paul does not see this slavery as a demeaning position but a dignified state. The phrase also reflects old testament usage where prophets were described as slaves of God - Obadiah even translates as "servant of God". For Paul the idea of a slave means someone who belongs to the master and is completely focused on doing the masters work. Some modern translations use "servant" in place of slave but that does

not really communicate the ownership type of relationship implied by Paul. A key thought in Paul's thinking here is that his life is owned by another. The NASB uses bond-servant but that is probably even less clear to the modern reader; the Lexham bible, which aims to be very literal, uses slave.

*Called* Paul claims to be "called to be an apostle". This also does not translate well. What Paul means is that he became an apostle by being called. The "call" was not an invitation or summons but was a work of God that changed Paul. The audience would also remember that Israel was called out and set apart as a chosen nation; so this was understood to be a way that God worked. We need to remember that God's calling for us is not an offer but a transforming work of grace by God in our lives. We are all called in different ways and most people struggle to see that - remember the calling is not an offer but a work of grace in your life.

The term apostle was used to refer to the original twelve but was also used generically to refer to those sent out to spread the word. Paul claims he was an apostle, an apostle was someone commissioned as an envoy or messenger with the emphasis focusing back on the sender, hence ambassador would be a similar idea.

*"Set apart for the gospel of God"*. Galatians 1:15 says "set apart before I was born". Paul's apostleship was not an accident or chance opportunity but was God's destiny for Paul from the beginning. Paul was not a man lacking in confidence and his confidence comes from a strong belief that God had chosen him by a special action (the calling) for a special mission (apostleship).

*"Gospel"* refers to the good news that Paul is preaching. Paul later references Isaiah, so these passages were clearly in his thinking:

*(7) How beautiful upon the mountains*

*are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns".*

*(8) Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion.*

*(Isaiah 52, NRSV)*

*(1) The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;*

*(Isaiah 61, NRSV)*

The use of ‘*Good news*’ was also used to refer to the birthday of the emperor. Paul may have been using the term provocatively. Paul may have been saying this is the only real good news, other claims of good news are false. Certainly his audience would have understood the dual meaning.

### 2.2.2 Romans 1:2-4

Verses 2-4 summarises the gospel just referred to.

*(2) which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,*

*(3) the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh*

*(4) and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,*

*(Romans 1, NRSV)*

The first point here is that God had promised the gospel beforehand, this leads us to several conclusions:

- God keeps his promises.
- The promises were outlined in scripture and Paul was reading scripture to find precedent of how God works.
- God’s prophets were Paul’s predecessors in that they were also “set apart”.

“*Descended from David*” is a common Jewish understanding of who the Messiah would be. From the flesh means a literal descendent not a metaphorical descendent, someone who was actually related to David and not just someone who behaved in a similar fashion, the phrase literally means “of the seed of David”.

“*Declared*” means to mark off, define, designate or appoint. Thus the statement says that the son was appointed to a higher status - son of God with power - above and beyond his historical position, he is more than just a figure in history. Paul does not mean the son of God is being declared with power where the power is in the declaration but that the declaration is about the son of God who has the power. The resurrection of Jesus is the defining event that shows that power. Without the resurrection Jesus would have been an historical Messiah, a revolutionary or another prophet. The resurrection makes Jesus more than that, the resurrection implies a transformation, Jesus was not just resuscitated, that would have brought him back to life as his former self. Lazarus was resuscitated. Jesus was resurrected because he came back in a wholly new state. The resurrection declares Jesus as the son of God. Resurrection always implies a transformation and the resurrection marks Jesus out as different, by overcoming death it marks him out as the son of God. If we share in his death then we

also share in his resurrection and that brings transformation, we are no longer our old selves.

*“Our Lord”* Finally Paul refers to Christ as “our lord” reinforcing a common lordship between him and the Romans. Its not “my Lord” or “your Lord” but “our Lord”; this is Paul setting up a common understanding for the coming statements. He is laying a foundational understanding of a shared Lordship, even though he doesn’t know most of these people they have something in common and if Paul was appointed by God to a special mission by the very Lord they share in common then Paul is worth listening to.

### 2.2.3 Romans 1:5-7

*(5) through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,*

*(6) including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,*

*(7) To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*(Romans 1, NRSV)*

*“Grace and apostleship”* actually refers to one gift, not two. Apostleship is a working out of grace in the life of Paul. This type of phrase is known as a hendiadys where two words are used together but they refer to one thing through connected phrases such as “warm and cosy”. Paul’s apostleship is part and parcel of the grace he experiences. Paul states that the purpose of this gift is to bring the gentile world to faith. The use of the phrase “obedience of faith” in the NRSV is a bit misleading and the NIV “obedience that comes from faith” better expresses the meaning. The point is that this new faith must be worked out in a new

morality, it is not just a belief but a transforming new life. For Paul to two are inextricably linked. This concept is made clear in Paul’s teaching on the fruits of the spirit in Galatians Chapter 5.

Sometimes we focus on faith to the point that we forget the accompanying transformation that is manifested in the fruits of the spirit. We can’t say a magic phrase and be right with God, we need to share in his resurrection. Faith is about a relationship with Jesus. Often we confuse faith with belief. We think that if we believe in certain doctrines and can tick the necessary boxes we will be right with God. That is man’s thinking. Paul sums this up later in chapter 12:

*(2) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*(Romans 12, NRSV)*

Paul also points out that his mission is “among all gentiles” and that implies his mission includes the people in Rome itself.

Paul uses two terms in his greeting and it is a common phrase he uses in many of his letters: emph“grace and peace”.

*Peace* is the standard Jewish greeting (Shalom) it is not the absence of strife but whatever makes for someone’s higher good. Peace is independent of someone’s external circumstances.

*Grace* is a play on words. The standard Greek greeting is Chaireie which means rejoice. However Paul takes the standard greeting and twists it to Chaire – Grace. However it has an edge here because of the squabbling going on in Rome. In the same way apostleship was an outworking of grace for Paul so he wishes them peace as an outworking of grace in their situation.

### 2.2.4 What can we conclude from this

The Christian Church was very different from Judaism. The temple had separate areas for women and gentiles, the Christian meetings did not distinguish between Jew, Gentile, slave, free, male or female as Paul says in Galatians 3:

*(28) There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

*(Galatians 3, NRSV)*

This was a totally new society and one both Jews and Romans would have seen as scandalous.

People within the Church held a variety of beliefs. They were united in their belief in a resurrected Jesus but they held differing views on issues like diet.

The Christian Church, the Eklesia, met in people's houses in small groups but there was no concept of "go to Church", they were the Church. In fact by coming here today you have not come to Church, you have just brought the Church to this house. In fact we need to be wary of traditional Christian constructs because they separate us from God, for example:

"Going to Church" implies the Church is a place and takes away from the message that we are the Church, every day. It is going back to building the temple that Jesus rendered redundant. Man desperately trying to put God back in the box. Scholars actually believe there were almost no buildings used exclusively as Churches for the first two hundred years of Christianity.

"Going to Church on Sunday" - implies that Sunday is a day we put on our best clothes and go to meet God. It is right that people should have time to rest and relax but Sunday

is not special - we meet with God every day, not just on a Sunday. We need to be careful that rather than keeping Sunday special we actually relegate God to Sunday and forget him the rest of the week.

Finally a question: Paul talked about his "grace and apostleship" and he wished the Romans "grace and peace". How is grace working out in our lives? Is grace worked out in our being patient with someone in need - grace and patience. Do we need to forgive a family member - grace and forgiveness? Grace is being worked out in everyone because that is part of the transformation the resurrection promises, but as people we sometimes struggle to see it.

### 2.3 Romans 1:8-15

*(8) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.*

*(9) God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you*

*(10) in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.*

*(11) I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong -*

*(12) that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each others faith.*

*(13) I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.*

*(14) I am a debtor both to Greeks and*

*non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.*

*(15) That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.*

*(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

*(17) For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith”.*

*(Romans 1, NRSV).*

Paul has made his point in the first seven verses that the gospel was promised beforehand and God has kept his promise as seen in the resurrection of Jesus. Paul now gets down to the main point of his letter and begins to outline his missionary vision.

### 2.3.1 Romans 1:8

*(8) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.*

*(Romans 1, NRSV)*

Paul thanks God for them. He thanks God there is a community in Rome proclaiming a new kingdom and a new saviour literally in sight of the false God Nero living on the hill above the poor district the Christians would have lived in.

Verse eight is the standard greeting sentence that the listeners would expect at this stage. Paul often tweaks this part of his letters to point forward to the main point and here he mentions that the faith of the Romans is known throughout the Christian world, he is already pointing to the spread of the gospel - mission. We need to always remember that Romans is

a letter about mission. Paul uses verse eight to thank God for the Romans and then spends the rest of this section talking about his travel plans for the next phase of his mission.

Paul is also complimenting them. Paul has never been to Rome, he needs to build bridges and a compliment doesn't do any harm. The Church in Rome had problems but Paul doesn't start there, he starts with the positive. It is easy to be critical but we should search for the positive in people and focus on that when we talk to them. If we expect to lead people to Christ and help people grow we need to see the positive in people. Christ loves those people, if we don't grasp that we won't reach them - who wants to listen to someone who doesn't even like them.

### 2.3.2 Romans 1:9-10

*(9) God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you*

*(10) in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.*

*(Romans 1:9-10, NRSV)*

Paul claims that God is not just an observer of his prayers but a witness; someone who would testify in court to his prayers. This is part of Paul building his bridges. He is saying his God is their God and he would testify of Paul's fervour for the Roman Church.

### 2.3.3 Romans 1:11-12

*(11) I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong –*

*(12) that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each others faith.*

*(Romans 1:11-12, NRSV)*

Paul talks of imparting a spiritual gift and then elaborates that he wants to encourage them to help them remain strong. The gift he wants to both impart and receive is encouragement - *parakaleó*. He talks about gifts later in chapter twelve and includes encouragement in that list.

(6) *We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;*

(7) *if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach;*

(8) *if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

(Romans 12:6-8, NIV)

Paul uses the word *parakaleó* in Romans 1 that he uses in Romans 12. It has been variously translated as exhort (NRSV), encourage (NIV, ESV, NASB) and comfort (KJV).

When we meet with each other we should consider what spiritual gift we can impart to others and what gift do we hope to receive? Do we need encouragement or are who in our fellowship is in need of encouragement?

### 2.3.4 Romans 1:13

(13) *I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.*

(Romans 1:13, NRSV)

Now Paul has talked about their mutual faith and has built his bridges he now feels

confident to refer to them as “*Brothers and sisters*”. Paul will use this form of address in the rest of the letter.

Paul uses a double negative to emphasize the next section - emph“I do not want you to be unaware”. This is a common form used by Paul and he used it in his letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:1, 1 Cor 12:1, 2 Cor 1:8) and Thesalonians (1 Thess 4:13). What he wants them to know about is his desire to visit them, not the details of why it was prevented. We do not know for certain what delayed Paul but it could have simply been that he was busy, some scholars believe this is the delay alluded to in 1 Corinthians 16:8-9.

(8) *But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost,*

(9) *for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

(1 Cor 16:8-9, NRSV)

Paul talks of wanting “*a harvest among you*”. The word used is *karpós* which actually means fruit the same word Jesus uses in John’s gospel when he talks about the vine.

(1) *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.*

(2) *He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.*

(John 15:1-2, NRSV)

### 2.3.5 Romans 1:14-17

(14) *I am a debtor both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.*

(15) *That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.*

*(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

*(17) For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith”.*

Paul calls himself a debtor - “*opheilētēs*”. The word refers to someone under an obligation to pay back a debt. The key point here is the obligation - Paul has an obligation to share the gospel with those who do not know it. The obligation comes from his calling, until he has completed his mission he considers himself in debt to those people and that indebtedness will take him to Jerusalem, Rome and then onto Spain, the end of the known world.

“*Greeks and non-Greeks*” is not a racial delineation but refers to those who are part of the hellenic culture and speak Greek and those who do not.

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