

## St. Paul's Letter to the Romans

Almighty God and father in your infinite wisdom You raised up for Your Church the Apostle Paul, a man transformed by his encounter with Your Son who sent him on a life journey of discipleship as His Apostle to the Gentile Nations. Beloved Holy Spirit, give to us the passion of St. Paul for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and guide us as we begin our study of Paul's Letter to the Church in Rome. We pray in the Name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

AMEN

Why Paul wrote to the Church in Rome

I. Unique characteristics of this letter – Paul wrote to seven different Communities

A. This is the only letter to a church he did not found

B. Written to a community that he had not even visited

*Note: is this the beginning of the theological understanding of the universal nature of ministry, Bishop for the whole church, Priest ordained as priest not for a church, but for the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church*

C. It is the longest of all of his letters

D. It is the more theological and refers to all the major theological tenants of the faith

II. Paul's Situation – Who what when where and why

A. Written from Corinth during an extended stay probably 57/58 A.D.

1. Comfortable in Corinth

2. Making plans for the future of his ministry – note the survey of his ministry in ROM 15:17-21 – he is being reflective

3. He is planning to go to Jerusalem to deliver the collection in the Spring of 58

4. His ultimate goal is Rome and then west to Spain ROM 15:24-28

- B. The best explanation is that Paul wrote to introduce himself to the Church in Rome
1. Antioch has financed his previous missionary journeys, but they were in the East
  2. Paul is looking for support for his Eastern Mission
    - a. Spiritual support – prayer
    - b. Financial and material support
  3. He is known by some to be a controversial figure – He is writing to calm fears
    - a. Jewish/Christian (Rome is primarily Gentile Christians)
    - b. Confrontational to authority (Rome has seen religious oppression)

Edit of Claudius in 49 A.D. Jews were expelled from Rome – It is then that Prisca and Aquila went to Corinth. In 54 when Claudius died the edit was lifted and many Jews returned to Rome. This would have included the Jewish/Christians. In their absence the Gentile group would have been in control of the church, with their return the Jewish/Gentile issues all returned

We note Paul's writing for tolerance for the strong and weak – he is not referring to strong or weak in faith, but in authority in the church ROM14:1-15:13

An Example is the issue of meat – when the Jews were expelled and returned there may have been few Jewish butchers – thus no Kosher Meat. Jewish/Christians continues to keep Kosher the Gentile Christian did not.

Paul's instructions for this issue also give us additional insight to the lack of relationship Paul had with this church. In the Letter to the Corinthians he is direct and clear in his instructions concerning eating, but here he is more moderate in his tone and defectiveness

- C. Note the Contrast with John on the Issue of Authority and Paul's Letter to Rome
1. Note what we studied in the Revelation to St. John
    - a. Christian duty to resist the Roman Authority
    - b. The evil nature of Nero and Rome

2. Paul is stressing that he is not coming to stir up the people
  - a. He teaches submission to the civil authority ROM 13:1-7

The issue in Rome at the time was Taxes and Tariffs - the result is that Nero prevented the senate from removing the taxes, rather to change the system that had encouraged Tax Collectors to extort money from the people.

#### D. Alternative Suggestions have been made

1. This is Paul's Last Will and Testament – (positive and negative arguments)
  - a. He was executed in Rome and never went on to the West
  - b. His intent is clearly was to continue his work
2. There is also the suggestion that this work is a review for Paul of the account he will be called upon to give of his work when he goes to Jerusalem
  - a. Paul does ask for the prayers of the Roman Church for this task  
Rom15:30            BUT.....
  - b. The letter is written to a Gentile audience – why not address the Jewish issues?

### III. The Christian Church at Rome

- A. Founding is uncertain – no specific Apostle is noted like Paul
- B. There was a large Jewish Community in the Capital and Active Trade
  1. Economic Contacts – trade inbound slaves etc. Gentile Christianly?
  2. Economic Contacts – outbound – the traders who traveled would have come in contact with Christianity - ACTS 2:10 Jewish Christianity?
- C. The spread of Christianity at Rome
  1. Synagogue Worship and he informal meetings before and after (Coffee Hour)
  2. Following the expulsion of the Jews more underground
  3. There must have been wealthy gentile members – house churches

We note Paul's use of the word *ekklesia* (Assembly, gathering, council). In other letters he refers to the meeting of Christians as the *ekklesia* and he also refers to the larger gather of the Body of Christ, the church as the *Ekklesia*. No so in this letter.

From this it is extrapolated that the churches in Rome were house churches and there was not the central gathering or authority of other area. The oppression of Roman Authority may be the reason.

Note the writing of Emperor Claudius: (41-54) who expelled the Jews.

“ There was constant rioting at the instigation of Chrestus” Suetonius, Claudius' scribe and biographer consider Chrestus to be the agitator as if he were actually present in the community. It may be that what is being referred to is the agitation between he Gentile and Jewish Christian in the synagogues at the time. This is the basis for the expulsion of the Jews from Rome and we should also note was the source of the friction between the returning Jewish Christians after the death of Claudius

By 64 Nero notes in the writing of Tacitus that there is a clear distinction between the Christians Community and the Jewish Community in Rome. Paul's Letter arriving just before this time may have played a role in clarifying this distinction both for the community and fro the Roman Authorites.