

## **STUDIES IN ROMANS**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **I. HOW WAS CHRISTIANITY ESTABLISHED IN THE CITY OF ROME?**

Doubtless many Jews from Rome attended the annual feasts in the time of our LORD and became, to some extent, acquainted with the issue between our LORD's kingdom and the rulers in Jerusalem. It is certain that among the great number of Jews gathered together from various nations, Roman-Jews and proselytes heard Peter's great sermon on the Day of Pentecost, some of whom doubtless were converted on that day. Through these converts, on their return, the Gospel may have been carried to Rome.

It is much more probably that Stephen's ministry may have sent converts to Rome, particularly after the dispersion following Saul's persecution. We, at least, note in the salutation of this letter certain kindred of Paul who were in CHRIST before him. This very fact may account for the bitterness and madness of Paul's persecution of the church, since under Stephen's mighty power a breach had been made into his family circle. The kindred, we know, were in Rome at the time this letter was written.

How did Paul come to know so many people in Rome? Paul's acquaintance and friendship with Aquila and Priscilla, banished from Rome by Claudius, could increase his knowledge of the personnel of Roman Christians. Moreover, his great meetings held in Syria, Cilicia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia necessarily brought many Romans, both Jews and Gentiles, under the influence of his ministry. Hence, we note in this letter salutations to his converts in Asia. The travel and traffic to and from Rome along the lines of the great Roman roads, extending to the boundaries of the empire, would continually enlarge Paul's knowledge of the Christians at Rome whether Jews or Gentiles. In this natural way we account for the intimate personal salutations at the close of this letter.

#### **II. NO CHURCH, BUT CHURCHES**

There was no central church at Rome. They had no common meeting-place, but there were several churches meeting in private houses; at least three, we may gather from this letter, particularly the one in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. Hence, the letter is not addressed to the church at Rome, but to all the faithful in Rome. In accounting for the establishing of Christianity here we must not lose sight of the labors of Christian women, whom Paul calls fellow workers, so manifest in the salutation.

### **III. PETER NOT THE FOUNDER**

It is a false tradition that makes Peter the founder of Christianity at Rome and the first bishop of the church there.

As we see from this letter, there was no central church and there was only a possibility of Peter's indirect influence through his Pentecostal sermon. Stephen's influence in this direction is more to be credited than Peter's and Paul's much more than either of them. Aquila and Priscilla should have the credit of establishing the first church there, and the noble Christian women saluted by Paul share the honors with them. The Romanists indeed contend that Peter went to Rome immediately after the events recorded in Acts 12:1-18, and remained twenty years. But this contention contradicts the Scriptures, for we find him soon thereafter at the council, Acts 15, and still further afterwards at Antioch, Galatians 2:11, and it may be inferred from I Corinthians 9:5 that Peter was at that time traveling as an apostle to the circumcision. And as late as his first letter we find him in Babylon where were many Jews. That he was not at Rome when Paul wrote this letter is evident from the absence of any salutation to him among so many; nor was he there when Paul arrived more than two years later as a prisoner. There is no reference to him as being in Rome in the letters of either the first or last imprisonment there of Paul.

It has also been contended that the household churches cited by Paul in this letter were only worshiping and not organized bodies, but this is contrary to the meaning of the word "church," and also to the uniform apostolic method of ordaining elders in every congregation and otherwise fitting them up for housekeeping. They were not like cattle men on the range marking, branding and letting loose.

### **IV. THE AUTHOR, THE DATE, THE PLACE**

Paul's authorship has never been seriously questioned by the scholarship of Christendom. The letter avows it in the beginning, and every internal evidence and all its relations to Galatians and Corinthians support it.

The date is largely determined by its relation to Corinthians and Galatians. In II Corinthians and Galatians he replies to a challenge of his apostolic authority with the internal evidence overwhelmingly in favor of Romans following Galatians, Romans being developed from Galatians. As Ephesians, the more general discussion, follows Colossians, so Galatians, being an off-hand, fiery, impulsive letter, is followed by Romans, a calm, deliberative enlargement. The parallels between the two letters are very striking and abundant. The reader may find in Lightfoot a discussion of these remarkable parallels.

So, we may say that Paul wrote this letter from the house of Gaius at Corinth about 58 A.D. Doctor Robertson's argument for this date in his Student's Chronological New Testament is very fine. Lightfoot's argument from internal evidence of the relative order of Corinthians, Galatians and Romans is extraordinarily strong.

### **V. OCCASION AND PURPOSE**

The occasion is evident from the letter itself. He is the guest of Gaius in the City of Corinth. He

has concluded his labors in those parts, and is about to make his final visit to Jerusalem, carrying the alms for the poor saints which he has gathered in the great collection in Macedonia, Achaia and Asia minor. After this Jerusalem visit he purposes a tour into Spain via Rome. To prepare the way for this forthcoming visit to Rome, he wrote this letter, having an opportunity of sending it by Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea, the eastern Corinthian seaport.

But the purpose of the letter goes far beyond the occasion. The attack on his apostolic authority, and the very heart of his Gospel, by the Judaizing Christians whom he has been resisting locally and in a somewhat off-hand manner in his letters to the Corinthians and Galatians, he now realizes to be not only more than a local matter, more than a personal attack on his authority, but an incorrigible far-reaching, fundamental assault on the whole plan of salvation by grace. Impulsive, off-hand and local replies do not meet the exigencies of the situation. There must be a calm, dispassionate and elaborate exposition of the whole plan of salvation sufficient for every emergency and for all time to come. Such a discussion would likely accomplish the greater good and attain the wider circulation if addressed to the saints at the imperial capital, for which as a center radiated influences to all the circumference of the world. Moreover, this very discussion, forwarded at once to Rome, might anticipate and forestall the Judaizing tendency steadily moving westward from Jerusalem. Hence, there is nothing local in his argument.

## **VI. THE NATURE AND CONTENT**

The concluding part, with its personal salutations, might well be left out of copies sent abroad, as we actually find to be the case in some manuscripts. Hence, while it is a letter, it is much more than a letter -- it is a doctrinal treatise, a veritable body of systematic theology. While Ephesians, developed from the more local letter to the Colossians, is of the nature of a general circular, and in this respect somewhat resembling this letter, and while Hebrews bears resemblance in that it is an elaborate discussion of the two covenants, yet addressed to Christian Jews only, this letter is unlike anything else in the New Testament.

It is the most fundamental, vital, logical, profound and systematic discussion of the whole plan of salvation in all the literature of the world. It touches all men; it is universal in its application; it roots, not only in man's creation and fall, but also in the timeless purposes and decrees of GOD before the world was, and fruits in the eternity after this world's purgation.

It considers man as man and not as Jew or Greek.

It considers law, not as expressed in statute on Mt. Sinai, but as antedating it and inherent in the divine purpose when man was created in the image of GOD.

It considers sin, not as ceremonial defilement, nor as an overt act, but as lawlessness of spirit and nature.

It considers condemnation, not as personal to an individual offender because of many overt acts, but as a race-result from one offense of the one head of the race.

Consequently,

It considers justification, the opposite of condemnation, not as an impossible acquittal of a fallen sinner on account of his many acts of righteousness but as acting on ONE act of righteousness, through the Second HEAD of the race.

It considers, not an impossible morality coming from a corrupt and depraved nature, but a morality arising from regeneration, sanctification, resurrection and glorification.

It considers, not the divine government and providence as here and there looking in on particular men, in special times and given localities, but as an all-comprehensive sweep from eternity to eternity reaching with microscopical minuteness every detail of the nature of man, and universal in its control of all forces, and all subsidiary to the original divine purpose.

The GOD of this letter is GOD INDEED -- not a partial, local deity, not blind chance, not cold inexorable fate, but a purposeful, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, infinitely holy and infinitely loving GOD.

I must not close this introductory chapter without calling attention to the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament as shown by the great number of Old Testament quotations in the book. Genesis is quoted five times, Exodus four, Leviticus twice, Deuteronomy five times, I Kings twice, Psalms fifteen times, Proverbs twice, Isaiah nineteen times, Ezekiel once, Hosea twice, Joel once, Nahum once. Habakkuk once, Malachi once; and there are others more indirectly used.

It is also notable that Paul sometimes quotes from the Hebrew, at other times from the Septuagint, and sometimes follows the spiritual impulse in giving the true sense in his own words.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STIMULATION AND REVIEW**

1. How was Christianity established in the City of Rome?
2. Why was not the letter addressed to the church at Rome? How was it addressed?
3. Who probably led in the establishment of the first church in Rome? What of Peter, Stephen and Paul in this connection?
4. Were the household churches cited by Paul in this letter organized bodies? Why?
5. Tell of the author, date and place of the letter.
6. What was the occasion of the letter?
7. What of the purpose of the letter?
8. In what sense was this letter "more than a letter"?
9. How must this letter rank among other letters of the New Testament?
10. Tell something of the scope of the discussion in the letter.
11. What of Old Testament influence on the Epistle?

### **LET US RETHINK THE CHAPTER**

- I. How Christianity Was Established in Rome
- II. No Church, but Churches
- III. Peter Was Not the Founder

IV. The Author, the Date, the Place  
V. The Occasion and the Purpose  
VI. The Nature and Content

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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