

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

ROM. 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

9 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;

10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

13 Now I would not have you ig-

norant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

NOTES

Paul's Desire to Visit Rome

Lesson Text: Romans 1:8-17

Related Scriptures: I Thessalonians 1:1-4; I Corinthians 1:18-24;
Galatians 3:10-14

TIME: A.D. 56

PLACE: from Corinth

GOLDEN TEXT—"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Lesson Exposition

Of all the epistles of the Apostle Paul, Romans is considered the weightiest. It sets forth the gospel Paul preached in a clear and systematic manner.

PRAYERS OFFERED—Rom. 1:8-10

Faith proclaimed (Rom. 1:8). From what we know of ancient letter writing, Paul's format is typical of other writings of the day. A letter writer would usually begin by identifying himself, after which it was common to offer some word of thanks before getting into the main body of the letter.

The first thing that Paul gave thanks for was the very presence of a church in the city of Rome. That such a strong congregation was located in the imperial city was not only remarkable but would prove strategic in the spread of the gospel. Living in the shadow of Roman authority was a challenge, to say the least.

At this early stage of Christian history, followers of Christ were seen as a Jewish sect. As time went on, however, believers were viewed as a threat to Rome and suffered intense persecution

at the hands of the Roman government. But in spite of these challenges, the faith of the Roman saints was "spoken of throughout the whole world" (vs. 8). Considering the fact that Christ's death and resurrection had occurred only a bit over twenty-five years previous makes this even more remarkable.

Frequent prayers (Rom. 1:9-10). In addition to thanking God for the faith of the Roman believers, Paul also interceded regularly on their behalf.

Concerning the content of his prayers, Paul petitioned the Lord about the possibility of a visit to Rome. This means that he gave forethought to planning his missionary endeavors while also recognizing that God's will must be his first priority (cf. Jas. 4:13-15).

As some of us have discovered, God may not answer our prayers in the way we expect. Paul would eventually make it to Rome, but not in the way he had expected. It would be several years before he arrived in the city, and that would happen as the result of a false accusation in Jerusalem, his subsequent arrest, several hearings,

and his appeal to the emperor himself (Acts 21:27-32; 25:1-12). Obviously, it was God's will for Paul to travel to Rome, but he would not get there in comfort or on his own schedule.

PLANS ANTICIPATED— Rom. 1:11-13

Spiritual gift (Rom. 1:11). Later on in the letter we learn that one of the reasons Paul wanted to travel to Rome was to secure their assistance in further missionary work in Spain (cf. 15:23-24). Another reason was to impart "some spiritual gift" to them (1:11). Such gifts are usually understood as special endowments given by the Holy Spirit to believers (cf. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11-12). Since apostles could pass these gifts on to others (cf. Acts 8:18), some see Paul's words in Romans 1:11 as a promise that he would do so when he arrived. Some gifts, however, were already present in the Roman church, according to chapter 12.

Another possibility is that Paul was simply saying that he wanted to visit them for the purpose of mutual encouragement and spiritual growth. The Greek word for "established" means "made strong." Of course, these Roman disciples were not weak, but they could be stronger, as is true with all of us.

Spiritual growth (Rom. 1:12-13). Paul seems to be qualifying what he had just written by stating that they could be "comforted together," or mutually encouraged, as they shared their faith with one another. In short, both the Apostle Paul and the Roman saints could be edified spiritually by his visit. Indeed, all of us can and should encourage one another often. Discouragement is certainly one of the greatest tools of Satan to weaken individual Christians and congregations.

Turning again to his planned vis-

it, Paul did not want them to be uninformed. In fact, he had planned to visit previously but had been hindered from doing so. He was confident that he would see some good results from such a visit. As he had succeeded in winning the lost in other parts of the Gentile world, he believed that with God's help, others could be won to Christ in Rome and beyond.

PREACHING VALIDATED— Rom. 1:14-17

Indebted (Rom. 1:14). Knowing that the "harvest truly is great" (Luke 10:2), Paul was committed to reaching all people everywhere with the message of salvation. He was even willing to make personal concessions to see this goal realized (cf. I Cor. 9:19-23). As he had been rescued by the grace of God, he now wanted to preach this message to others. He therefore had a great sense of indebtedness to God and felt a personal obligation to share with others what he had himself received. He would not turn away from this call he had received from the Lord (Acts 26:19).

In the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, those who did not know Greek were considered barbarians. Paul wanted to reach all people, both those in the cultural mainstream and those outside it.

Unashamed (Rom. 1:15-16). When Paul said he was "ready" to preach the gospel in Rome, he meant that he was eager to do so. In spite of the many privations and persecutions he had suffered as a Christian worker (cf. II Cor. 11:23-28), he had absolutely no reluctance in sharing the good news with any and all who would listen. Indeed, some did not want to listen, but he shared the message anyway (Acts 17:1-9, 32-34).

As a bold proclaimer of the riches of God's grace, Paul was unashamed

of both his message and his mission. If his message had been based on false testimony or fables, he would have been a false witness to God's Word (I Cor. 15:15; II Cor. 2:17; II Pet. 1:16) and unworthy of his high calling (II Tim. 4:1-5). But because Paul knew the gospel was the true word of God, he would continue to preach it, even at great risk to himself.

Besides that, Paul knew that the gospel was powerful and would produce results. The word translated "power" in Romans 1:16 is the Greek *dynamis*, from which we get words like "dynamo" and "dynamite" in English. The power of the gospel can save sinners from God's wrath and enable them to live holy lives.

Paul realized that the gospel must be preached to all people, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). By "Greek," Paul meant Gentiles, not just people who were from Greece. Preaching to Jews first was understandable, as they were God's chosen people with a privileged place in God's plan (9:1-5; 11:1-2). Even Jesus focused on His own Jewish countrymen (Matt. 15:24). Still, it is clear from the Great Commission—recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke—that the disciples were to take the gospel to the whole world.

Practically speaking, Paul reached out to Jewish people first during his missionary journeys. Arriving in a city, he sought out the Jewish synagogue. There he would find people who believed in one God, accepted the Old Testament as God's Word, and were awaiting the Messiah. Hence, the synagogue became the beachhead for the gospel. Only after his Jewish brethren largely rejected the message did Paul turn to the Gentiles, who were often very receptive.

Righteousness revealed (Rom. 1:17). There are two main ways the word "righteousness" is used in Scrip-

ture. Sometimes it means moral uprightness and can refer to either God or man (Gen. 7:1; Ps. 129:4; Jas. 5:16). It is also used to reflect that status of being right with God.

This righteousness is "revealed from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17), meaning that it begins with faith and ends with faith. It is by faith from first to last (Heb. 12:2). Or perhaps it is "referring to the advance from one degree of faith to another" (Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans).

"The just shall live by faith" is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 and is a key verse in understanding Romans.

—John Alva Owston.

QUESTIONS

1. Why was Paul thankful for the Roman saints?
2. What does Paul mention besides his thanks for these Christians in Rome?
3. What plans did Paul have for the future?
4. What did he want to give to the Romans when he visited?
5. What good results did Paul look forward to from his visit with the Romans (Rom. 1:13)?
6. In what way did Paul consider himself indebted (vs. 14)?
7. What did he mean when he said he was "ready" to preach in Rome (vs. 15)?
8. What made Paul unashamed of the gospel?
9. Why was the gospel offered to the Jews first?
10. What does "from faith to faith" mean (vs. 17)?

—John Alva Owston.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Strong faith is a gift from God and blesses the body of Christ (Rom. 1:8).
2. God's leaders ought to show concern for His people (vss. 9-10).
3. Christians should provide support and comfort for one another through the love of Christ (vss. 11-13).
4. We must be ready to share the gospel regardless of circumstances (vss. 14-15).
5. We can boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ through His power (vs. 16).
6. The righteousness of God is revealed to us through faith in Him (vs. 17).

—Valante M. Grant.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Describe the impact of Christian faith on the world today.
2. What is the significance of spiritual leaders praying for God's people (Rom. 1:9-10)?
3. Discuss ways to continue the work of the Lord despite personal hesitancy.
4. Discuss the benefits of fellowship with other believers.
5. What are some modern-day challenges that may cause Christians to be ashamed of the gospel? How do we overcome these?
6. Why is it important to boldly proclaim faith in God? How does this affect our faith?

—Valante M. Grant.

Golden Text Illuminated

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

The Roman church had been on Paul's heart and mind for a long time. He had heard amazing reports about this group, and he wanted to meet with them (Rom. 1:8-13). Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and as such, encouraging and strengthening the faith of the Roman Christians was a priority for him.

Paul had never visited the church in Rome. This was not one of the churches he had founded. So, what fueled Paul's desire to see the Romans? Paul held a special mission from God. He was driven to visit this congregation. That he had never met them did not matter. These were not strangers to Paul but brothers and sisters in Christ.

But Paul's longing to come to Rome was not about fellowship alone. It centered on the truth he expressed in our golden text. Paul was eager to preach the gospel in Rome (vs. 15). He was compelled to proclaim everywhere and at every opportunity the gospel. He understood that the “gospel of Christ” is “the power of God unto salvation.”

Paul mentioned that the gospel came first to Jews. This was true in Jesus' ministry (cf. Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24), as well as in the ministry of the apostles, including Paul (cf. Acts 13:44-48). But while the focus of their ministry was on Jews, the Gentiles were not ignored. Many Gentiles responded in faith to the gospel and were saved.

—Jennifer Francis.