

Paul's Rationale for Visiting Rome

Sometimes, when we think all is lost, God opens the curtain and we see that we are not alone. God is working behind the scenes. We all need encouragement. See how God encouraged Elijah when he thought all was lost. Let us read 1 Kings 19:1-18 in your Bibles.

1 Kings 19:9 Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19:10 He said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

1 Kings 19:18 Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

As Christians, we are told to encourage one another.

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

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In our passage in Romans chapter 1, Paul talks about encouraging one another.

Romans 1:12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

Now we come to the next section of the introduction. At first glance, I see Paul's prayer for his journey to Rome:

1. **Thanksgiving.** In all things give thanks to God the Father. Paul gives thanks for the church in Rome. He is not giving thanks just for their existence, but he focuses on their outstanding characteristic: faith. This church was apparently not founded by an apostle. There are already pastor-teachers who are founding churches throughout the Romans empire. The church at Rome is one of those. This is an encouragement to Paul.
2. **Unceasing.** His prayer is "unceasing." We will see what that means.
3. **Prayer Petition.** That he would be allowed to journey to Rome.
4. **Prayer Petition/Intercessory:** That he would be able to impart to them some "spiritual gift." We know that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts at the point of salvation. So what is this "spiritual gift that Paul wants to impart to them?"
5. **Prayer Petition/Intercessory:** That both Paul and the Christians in Rome would be "encouraged."
6. **Rationale:** Paul's "obligation" is to minister to Gentiles. Rome is new territory in the Great Commission, Paul's ministry is targeted towards Gentiles. Rome has not had a documented apostolic visit. During our prayer preparation we may want to consider the rationale for the prayer. What exactly do I want to pray for? Why should God answer this prayer?
7. **Paul's Mental Attitude:** He is not going begrudgingly but "eager."

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8. **Gospel Message:** Paul returns to his central theme, the Gospel. Consider for a moment that Paul is writing to Christians in Rome. Believers. Yet he wants to preach the “gospel” or as I said previously, the “Good News.” So this “Good News” includes good news for believers. And as Herman has said, this is emphasized in Romans chapters 5-8. Chapter 8 is one of those special chapters that emphasizes Christian spirituality.

Since Paul is praying unceasingly, this could also be considered not just what he prayed for in the past but also prayer preparation for future prayers.

Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

First. This is actually “first” plus a particle that is often, as here, not translated. But it can be emphatic the way it is used. The Biblehub.com interlinear translates it “indeed.” Paul is emphasizing the first part of his prayer/prayer preparation by saying “I thank my God.” This is perhaps a habit of Paul to include thanksgiving to God first in his prayer. See Philippians 1:3 and Philemon 4. In all three passages, he uses the same phrase, (literally) I thank (present active indicative) the God of me. Paul’s prayer life is an intimate one-on-one relationship with God the Father. His God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

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1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always;

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing;

1 Thessalonians 5:18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

Ephesians 1:15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,

Ephesians 1:16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

Philippians 1:3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,

Philippians 1:4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,

Colossians 1:3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

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Colossians 1:4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

1 Thessalonians 1:2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

2 Thessalonians 1:3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

2 Timothy 1:3 I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day,

Philemon 4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,

Philemon 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;

I have purposefully quoted many “thank you” passages. It is important that individual believers recognize the source of their blessings. God values our “thank you” prayers. As Jesus said, this is part of our giving glory to God. We recognize who He is and how He manifests His loving character to believers.

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Jesus points out the importance of giving thanks to God since it glorifies Him.

Luke 17:11 While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee.

Luke 17:12 As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him;

Luke 17:13 and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

Luke 17:14 When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed.

Luke 17:15 Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice,

Luke 17:16 and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.

Luke 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they?"

Luke 17:18 Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?"

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Luke 17:19 And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well."

For Paul, there is a first. But there is no second or third in Romans chapter 1. Paul is highlighting his illustration of his prayer/preparation for coming to Rome. He didn't just jump on a sailing vessel and say "Take me to Rome." This was a huge undertaking. He prayed repeatedly (verse 9) about this trip in preparation for it.

Through Jesus Christ. What does it mean "through" Jesus Christ? I expected "by means of" or "in" instead of "through." Why "through." Leon Morris gives us an insight that will lead us to the doctrine of position in Christ, or positional truth.

"He offers his *thanksgiving through Jesus Christ*, another unusual expression; neither Paul nor anyone else can presume to approach God of himself (cf. Heb. 13:15)." As Herman warned us once, don't forget to check the footnotes. So Leon Morris has a footnote to expand on what he just said. "O'Brien points out that this is the only occurrence of this formula in Paul's thanksgivings. He sees it as meaning that "Christ is, in some sense, the Mediator of the thanksgiving" (*Introductory Thanksgivings*, p. 204). Cf. Bruce, "As it is through Christ that God's grace is conveyed to human beings (verse 5), so it is through Christ that the gratitude is conveyed to God."¹

He doesn't say "in" Christ but "through" Jesus Christ. This is not static. This is not a statement of position in which we stand. Certainly positional truth is a very important doctrine and provides the believer with a magnificent position. But there is a ***dynamic*** here. As Herman has said, Faith dependence on the Holy Spirit takes us to Jesus Christ who takes us to God the Father. Because of position in Christ we have direct access to

¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988, page 56

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the Father, a gateway. So Paul walks through that gateway to the throne of God the Father through Jesus Christ.

Because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. Here is a tremendous encouragement to Paul. He is not the only one proclaiming the good news. Someone else, probably not an apostle, founded the church in Rome. Not just that someone else founded a church, but that their faith is “world renowned.” Not only was the church founded, but the believers there are so successful in their walk by faith that the entire empire has heard of it. Because they had a good teacher to whom they listened. Wow!!!

Consider a parent whose grandchildren are successful in life. Think of how encouraged they are. So with Paul. Look at what God is doing.

Just as a side note, Nero was emperor at this time in Rome. It is appropriate to consider the historical context of Paul's journey to Rome.

“Nero was born at Antium in AD 37, the son of Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus and Agrippina the Younger, a great-granddaughter of the emperor Augustus. When Nero was three, his father died; when Nero was eleven, his mother married the emperor Claudius who adopted Nero as his heir. When Claudius died in AD 54, Nero became emperor with the support of the Praetorian Guard and Senate. In the early years of his reign, Nero was advised and guided by his mother Agrippina, his tutor Seneca the Younger, and his praetorian prefect Sextus Afranius Burrus, but soon sought to rule independently and rid himself of restraining influences. His power struggle with his mother was eventually resolved when he had her murdered. Roman sources implicate Nero in the deaths of both his wife Claudia Octavia – supposedly so he could marry Poppaea Sabina – and his stepbrother Britannicus.²”

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>

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“Most Roman sources offer overwhelmingly negative assessments of his personality and reign. Most contemporary sources describe him as tyrannical, self-indulgent, and debauched.³”

“Modern scholars believe that Nero's reign had been going well in the years before Agrippina's death. For example, Nero promoted the exploration of the Nile river sources with a successful expedition. After Agrippina's exile, Burrus and Seneca were responsible for the administration of the Empire. However, Nero's "conduct became far more egregious" after his mother's death. Miriam T. Griffins suggests that Nero's decline began as early as AD 55 with the murder of his stepbrother Britannicus, but also notes that "Nero lost all sense of right and wrong and listened to flattery with total credulity" after Agrippina's death. Griffin points out that Tacitus "makes explicit the significance of Agrippina's removal for Nero's conduct".⁴”

Let us line up Paul's letter and visit to Rome with Nero's life. As we noted previously, Paul wrote the letter to the Romans in the year 57 A.D. It was two years later that he actually got to Rome in 59 A.D. That was the year Nero had his mother murdered. At that point, Nero's personality changed for the worse. Nero went from killing his brother Britannicus to murdering his mother to eventually killing Paul the preeminent apostle. He subsequently committed suicide. So Paul was taken to Rome in the year that Nero murdered his mother. At that point, Nero lost all restraint.

There is perhaps a hint in this history of the Angelic Conflict. Nero may have become demon possessed like Judas who was Satan possessed. Nero had Paul beheaded, according to extra-Biblical sources. Judas betrayed Jesus so that he was crucified. As a result, Paul's influence as a martyr was perhaps stronger when he was dead. They had his letters to

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>

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read. They were copied and distributed throughout the empire. So Paul could be in multiple places at the same time as a martyr.

Proclaimed. The base of the word comes from *aggelion*. It is a word for communication. *Eu + aggelion* (noun) = good news/gospel. *Kata + aggelio* (verb) is proclaim. This is not a word for sneaking around and whispering. No. This is standing on a mountain and shouting to the world.

Romans 1:9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,

For God...is my witness. How many times have you heard that phrase used by someone who is lying. God doesn't normally strike someone with lightning these days, but... So it sounds strange coming from Paul. But his words are the original. Jesus used a similar phrase.

John 5:37 And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.

John 5:38 You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.

John 8:18 I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me."

Now if Paul invokes the witness of God the Father, why would he do that? Because he prayed directly to God the Father.

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Preaching. You notice that in the NAS, this word is in italics. That means it is not in the original. It is added to smooth the translation.

Looks like we will have to pick up this prayer/prayer preparation next week.

Romans 1:10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

Romans 1:11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;

Romans 1:12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

Romans 1:13 I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Romans 1:14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

Romans 1:15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.