

### Paul's Concern for the Roman Believers

#### Romans 1:8—12

##### Paul's prayer

We can see the importance that Paul placed on prayer as he prayed for these Grace churches in Rome. He took prayer seriously, with the understanding that it is as important to pray as it is to study and be established in God's word. He first thanks God for the spiritual maturity of those in Rome. They had such a strong faith that it was actually proclaimed through the known world.

Paul then encourages them by saying that he often prays for them (verse 9), specifically that he may be able to come and visit with them in person (verse 10). Paul expands on this a bit in verse 12 saying that he wants to see them so that they, and he, will be encouraged (see also Romans 15:32). This is what good Christian fellowship is all about. How refreshing and encouraging it is to be able to be with other like-minded Christians. It's significant to see the importance Paul placed on prayer as he ministered to the churches. We likewise need to be "instant in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

##### A strong faith (verse 9)

Paul almost always has something positive to say about the churches he writes to. Even to the Corinthians, who were struggling with living a sanctified life, whom he praised for not lacking any gift and for waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:4—7). The only exception is when he wrote the Galatians, admonishing them for leaving the doctrine he taught them.

Interestingly, at the end of Romans we see they were obedient in grabbing ahold of Paul's teachings, and faithfully obeying him (Romans 16:17—19). This too was noised throughout all areas of the known world. Their strong faith came about because they studied Pauline doctrine and applied it in their everyday life. As they studied God's word, they became firm and unmovable, able to weather any attack on their spiritual life.

##### Serve in the spirit (verse 9)

Paul has already called himself a servant of Christ Jesus (verse 1) and now says that he serves God in the spirit by preaching His Son, Jesus Christ. The only way we can serve God is in the spirit, since the flesh is incapable of doing anything to please God (Romans 8:8). Romans 7 shows this battle that Paul had between the spirit and the flesh. The flesh wants to please self while the spirit only wants to please God. As Galatians 5:17 says, the flesh and spirit are contrary to each other. They don't operate at the same time. Look how Ephesians 2:1—3 describes our condition before salvation:

**Ephesians 2:1—3** <sup>1</sup>And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; <sup>2</sup> wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: <sup>3</sup> among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Please understand that the spirit, or new nature, was given to us when we became reconciled to God. The flesh is the old nature, the one we are born with because we are related to Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22). How do we serve God in the spirit? We are not the ones who decide what we should do to please God, God has already told us what He desires. Too many people think the best way to serve God is to find out where He is working and then join Him there. Sounds nice, but totally unbiblical. There is no verse that gives that advice. Paul says that we serve God by considering the old nature dead (Romans 6:11) then living a life that is consistent with Paul's teachings (Romans 16:17). Our whole existence is to be perfected so that we will be ready to serve, and to edify others (Ephesians 4:11—16).

### **Spiritual gift** (verse 11)

Paul desired to visit with the Christians in Rome, but it was more than just a meet and greet. He longed to be with them to encourage them in their faith, and at the same time be encouraged himself. He also wanted to see them so that he would be able to impart some spiritual gift. Too many see this as Paul wanting to give them a supernatural gift, often thought to be the gift of tongues. This isn't what Paul is saying at all. The context sets the stage for the meaning.

Most people seem to stop reading after Paul said he wanted to impart to them some spiritual gift. By reading on, we see this gift was ultimately for the purpose of establishing them firmly in their faith. To establish these believers required that they come under the hearing of God's word as revealed to Paul by Jesus Christ. To be established in the faith means understanding the Bible according to the revelation of the mystery (Romans 16:25). There is no other way to become established in our faith. We don't become established by reading other books, fellowshiping with other Christians, or even studying non-Pauline books of the Bible. The only way for us to truly be set firm in our faith is by studying Paul's 13 books and accepting his teaching as the doctrine we need to follow. The whole Bible is for our learning (Romans 15:4), but Paul's writings are directed to those who are in the Church, the Body of Christ.

This certainly seems quite narrow, however, we are told to be narrow in what we use to build up our faith. We know from Ephesians 4:11—13 that God gave the church gifts, including teaching-pastors who work at building up the saints with the goal that we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. This edification process should be a normal part of every believer, and is only available by studying Paul's doctrine. Those who are not growing unto perfection are in danger of being tossed by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14—15). Anyone who has set aside all or some of Paul's doctrine is unstable by ignoring teaching that is necessary for us to grow up in Christ (Ephesians 2:21; 4:15).

This spiritual gift that Paul wanted to impart to them was the riches of the glory of the Mystery (Colossians 1:27). The same gift that he wanted to impart to these Roman believers is available to us today through the study of Paul's 13 books. It's through study that we become established and unmovable in our faith.

### **Established** (verse 11)

Romans was written to establish the believers in Rome, and, by implication, the members of the Church, the Body of Christ. As stated above, to be established in faith means to understand God's word as given to the Apostle Paul. When we are established, we are set firmly and unmovable in Pauline doctrine.

Notice that although Paul said their faith was proclaimed throughout the whole world, that they were still in need of being established. I believe our establishment into Paul's doctrine and the growth of our faith is a never-ending endeavor. We are never told to stop studying, learning or growing.

Note: There are some who have noticed Romans 1:11 use of the word established and Romans 16:26 use of the word stablished in the King James Bible. Some teachers make the point that establish is like setting the forms and pouring the concrete while stablish is likened to the concrete being fully set up and cured. This seems to be reading something into Scripture that really isn't there. First, the very same Greek word is behind both translated words, second, dictionaries say stablish is merely the archaic form of the word establish, and finally, according to the dictionary at av1611.com, stablish means: "To fix; to settle in a state for permanence; to make firm. In lieu of this, establish is now always used." I'll leave it up to you to study this issue and make up your own mind.

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