

Romans #8

Paul believed in prayer and Luke's history of Paul's journeys shows him frequently engaged in prayer. In almost all his epistles he not only expressed thanksgiving for some particular thing of those to whom he wrote; often he prayed for special blessings for them. For different prayers for different congregations, read 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 1:17-19; 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-11 and 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. This common practice of Paul to pray for specific blessings for his brethren is also found in Romans where he wrote, "*For God is my witness whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers, making request ...*" (Rm. 1:9).

The request Paul made was thus, "*If by any means now at length I may be prospered by the will of God to come unto you*" (1:1). Paul had had a desire to visit the city for a long while. Luke records this desire in Acts 19:21: "*Now after these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying after I have been there I must see Rome.*" God approved Paul's desire and when Paul was taken prisoner in Jerusalem and was without doubt largely discouraged, perhaps feeling he would never be able to satisfy that desire; the Lord stood by him and said, "*Be of good cheer ... so must thou bear witness of me at Rome*" (Acts 23:11). The promise was repeated again when the ship Paul sailed in seemed in eminent danger of sinking (Acts 27:24). Still, however strong his desire might be to see Rome, prayerful believer he was, he was conscious that such would occur only if were it God's will. James wrote, "*For that ye ought to say if the Lord will, we shall both live and do this or that ...*" (Jm. 4:15).

Paul wish to see the Romans was "*that I may impart to you some spiritual gift*" (Rm. 1:11). What Paul meant by this has been debated by scholars. Did he mean he wanted to impart spiritual gifts or blessings to them through his teaching? He did say he desired to impart this spiritual gift "*to the end that ye may be established.*" Did he mean that he desired to lay hands on the Roman brethren that he might impart some of the nine gifts named in 1 Corinthians 12:3-10? I believe this to be this apostle's thought. We know spiritual gifts were imparted this way and that Paul had imparted to others gifts in his manner (Acts 8:14-18; 19:6; 2 Tim. 1:6). That some Romans already had spiritual gifts is evident (Rm. 12:3-8). Still the fact that neither secular or sacred history records the visit of any apostle to Rome before this time does not negate the fact that

spiritual gifts were ONLY imparted through apostolic hands being laid on them. There were visitors from Rome in Jerusalem on Pentecost and some of them may have been converted and received gifts there. And, although some did possess gifts in Rome, apparently Paul felt more gifts would be beneficial.

Paul desired to visit Rome, but had been "*hindered*" (1:13). He does not attribute this hindrance to the work of Satan as he did in other places (1 Thess. 2:18). We do know why he opted to write this letter at this time rather than make a personal visit to the Roman capitol: he had raised relief for Jerusalem's needy saints among churches of God in Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia and he deemed it best that he accompany the messengers of those churches who carried funds from the church he was the messenger of (15:22-25).

Paul's desire to visit Rome was not simply to see the grandeur of the queen city of the world, nor to visit relatives and dear friends; preacher that he was, apostle that he was, he desire to preach there that he might have some "*fruit among you also as in the rest of the gentiles*" (Rm. 1:13). His apostleship to the gentiles weighed heavily on his mind and he declares he was a debtor; he was ready and he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. So ought we also to be (Rm. 1:14-16)!

Jim McDonald