

Paul's Rationale for Visiting Rome – Part 2

Whether you like the movie “Avatar” or not, there are some scenes and thoughts expressed that are interesting to note. One of those is the security briefing given by the Marine colonel. There is an instruction from him that applies in principle to the Christian life: “If you wish to survive, you need to cultivate a strong mental attitude.”

You are in the Angelic Conflict. According to some, this is an intensified stage. It is an unseen battle but very real. You do not go out on the offense. That is the work of God. Your job is to learn to defend yourself with Bible information like Jesus did when he was tempted by Satan in the desert. Faith-Rest. Learn things about God that you can claim in faith. Jesus quoted Scripture to answer the Devil's provocations. As Jesus said,

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by (inspected?) the devil.

Tempted. This can mean testing for the purpose of verifying failure or for the purpose of verifying righteousness. Rather than use the word tempted or testing, ask the question, is there another word that better fits the context?

So what is the context? As soon as the Devil shows up, the context includes the Angelic Conflict and Satan's Appeal Trial. God the Father has just identified Jesus as “This is my beloved Son...” (Matthew 3:17).

This is the beginning of Jesus' ministry on earth. As such, in the context of the Appeal Trial of Satan, the Devil gets to verify this trial exhibit. He gets to inspect it.

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Matthew 4:2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

Matthew 4:3 And the tempter (?demonic inspector?) came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

The Devil's challenge was to get Jesus to rely on His deity to solve his human problems. This would have short-circuited the Father's plan. Jesus had to live on earth as a perfect man, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to solve problems. And in relying on the Holy Spirit, to apply Biblical principles to address human issues.

Matthew 4:4 But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

It is written. Perfect tense. It was written in the past with the result that it stands written for all time.

Jesus did not physically attack the Devil. No. He used the “sword” of the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17) to defend Himself against the temptations of the Devil.

The point is that in the Christian life you must cultivate a strong mental attitude based upon Biblical principles as Jesus did.

Let us move on to the lesson in Romans chapter 1.

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

Serve. This is not the service of slavery. This is not the service as work. This is a service in the spiritual realm.

For God...is my witness.

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

This is an interesting turn of phrase. Normally Christians are witness to the veracity of the gospel. Here God the Father is invoked as a witness to Paul's prayer. Remember, Jesus Christ also invoked the witness of God the Father. I gave the passages in the gospel of John last lesson.

Preaching. You notice that in the New American Standard Bible (NASB), this word is in italics. That means it is not in the original. It is added to smooth the translation. It is literally, "I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son..." I would assume that his human spirit is so full of gospel (good news) information that it is bursting forth into any audience that will listen to him. And here we have a book whose core theme is the good news. Remember, that is what the book of Romans is about: good news.

Spirit. Here is the center of our spiritual lives. We have a human spirit that interfaces with the Holy Spirit for spiritual matters. R.B. Thieme

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developed a doctrine he called the Grace Apparatus for Perception (GAP). It is obvious that our human eyes and ears are used to learn Bible information. It remains academic information if we do not understand and believe it. Then we can apply it in our lives. Thieme's explanation of GAP is much more involved the way I explained it. The key factors are the intake of the doctrine and the belief of it.

Unceasingly. This is referring to Paul's prayer life. The same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Herman commented on it there:

“As you go through the responsibilities of the day, we should be constantly in Faith in the Holy Spirit and when as things happen throughout the hour we take it to the Lord in Prayer. This Greek word was used in secular Greek to refer to one with a hacking cough—not cough continually but coughing all day long.—This should be our prayer life.¹” I couldn't say it better.

Make mention of you. The word “make” is like a helper verb here. The thrust of the verb is not on “making” but on a type of thought that looks forward. It gives dynamic or life to the noun “mention.” Yet, “mention,” in my opinion, is a bit anemic. It is a Greek word for memory. Paul has not seen Rome or been in the church in Rome. But his thinking in his mind is such that he is looking forward to meeting them and teaching them with strong thought. This is a word that we would normally associate with memories of past events. But here he is looking forward, perhaps as a future memory. This plays into the strong emotion expressed by the accumulation of words that describe his mental attitude.

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.

¹ http://www.springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/Thessalonians/notes/2015-10-04Sunday_Morning.pdf

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Always. Another word for repeated prayers. He just said “unceasingly.” Now he says “always.” Whenever he prays, he apparently mentions the church at Rome from a strong thought.

If perhaps now at last. There is a series of four Greek particles according to Adolph Deissmann. They are a conjunction (if) and three adverbs piled one upon the other. Here again is an emphasis of Paul. He is using words for repetition and then repeating his words for emphasis. In American English today, there are “four-letter” expletives that are not usually printed or spoken on TV. OK, they are but they didn’t use to be. They function as emphatic particles. The best I can do with a “clean” translation is Herman’s “I reeaalllly want to...”

Making request. This is, in my opinion pathetic. It should be stronger than this. I am begging God to come to you. This is not some vanilla request. This is a strong “begging” or “beseeching.” His emotion is shining through the words of this letter. He had an intense desire to journey to Rome and meet these Christians whose faith is “world renown.”

The problem that Paul will encounter is his own selfish desire to give the gospel to Jews in Jerusalem. Paul’s “territory” are the Gentile nations. Jerusalem was the “territory” of other apostles and James, the half-brother of Jesus. There is, of course, some overlap. As R.B. Thieme Jr. once said, Paul should have written the book of Romans and then taken it and got on a boat to Rome. Instead he has a two-year detour caused by going to the temple in Jerusalem and offering a vow.

Let us open our Bible and peruse some verses in Acts chapters 19, 20 and 21. Paul has so many places he still wants to visit. He has taught throughout “Asia,” which is today Turkey, Greece and Macedonia, which is today in Northern Greece. He says he wants to travel to Spain via Rome. He also wants to return to Jerusalem. But it would appear that his

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priorities are skewed. Jerusalem is the area of James and Peter. Perhaps Paul thinks that because he was a Pharisee he has an in with the Jewish crowd. But as we see, he is now considered a traitor. So much so that a group of Jewish men vow to kill him. All the while, Paul knew from others and from the Holy Spirit that things would not go well for him. God permitted Paul to go to Jerusalem. His permissive will was in play. Paul needed to learn some valuable lessons which he could only learn the hard way.

Acts 19:21 Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”

Apparently, Paul “purposed in the Spirit.” This may have been allowed by the “permissive” will of God. Sometimes we have to get our way to understand why it was an incorrect choice. It is the hard way of learning something. But for some, it is the only way they learn...if they learn.

Acts 20:22 And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,

Acts 20:23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

Acts 20:24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received

from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

Don't go Paul, or else. But Paul insists on going to Jerusalem. OK, Paul, you will learn what the "or else" is.

Acts 21:10 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Acts 21:11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

Acts 21:12 When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Acts 21:14 And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

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So instead of avoiding Jerusalem and going straight to Rome, Paul had decided he was going to make a journey to Jerusalem. This would delay Paul as much as two years in going to Rome.

This reminds me of the Reacher movie. Jack Reacher is challenged to a fight by five guys. So they go outside of the restaurant/bar. Just before the first punch is thrown, Reacher tells the other guy, “Remember, you wanted this.”

Remember. God allowed Paul to go. He did not prevent him from going.

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

I long. This is epi + potheo. Potheo by itself means “to long for” or “to yearn.” BibleHub.com/Strong's Concordance says the “epi” intensifies the meaning. This is a strong yearning.

**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.**

I planned. This trip has been on his mind for some time. His emotion has been building up.

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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.

Eager. Eager is not a bad translation. This word expresses enthusiasm. More emotion.

I don't know if any commentators see the emotion I see in these words of Paul. Look:

1. Verse 8: Paul thanks God for the “world renowned” faith of the Romans.
2. Verse 9: Paul prays unceasingly remembering them
3. Verse 10: Paul begs God to let him visit Rome
4. Verse 11: Paul has a strong yearning to see them
5. Verse 12: Paul to be encouraged and to encourage in Rome
6. Verse 13: Paul has planned several times to visit Rome
7. Verses 15: Paul is always eager to preach the gospel of which he is passionate about. He is enthusiastic about his planned trip to Rome.

Have you ever started to talk about a subject you really like and get on a roll. You can't stop talking about it because you are passionate about that subject. That is what appears to have happened with Paul at this point in the letter to the Romans. As he is putting his thoughts down on paper, or more likely, Luke or another amanuensis (secretary) is taking down dictation, he begins to realize how much he really wants to visit Rome.

That sometimes happens to me when someone asks about the book of Zephaniah or the Gospel of John.

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There is a question that comes to mind from all of this. Did Paul learn something from his suffering of being arrested and eventually being taken to Rome because of his appeal to Caesar? What follows is my speculation based upon observation. Certainly, it is incomplete, but it may give us some insight into Paul's thinking and how it changed as a result of his going to Jerusalem.

Suffering will often cause you to think about the cause of the suffering. If you are suffering because you are in status quo sinning, you should acknowledge the sin and get back to walking by faith. Job learned some things from his suffering. From Paul's writing after his visit to Jerusalem, we might infer some changes.

First, we know from Acts, that Paul was going to evangelize "kings."

Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;

Acts 9:14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Interesting word order. First to Gentiles; then kings and lastly to the sons of Israel. In Rome, he would meet members of Caesar's household.

Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

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In Romans, Paul understood

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

So, in taking Paul to Rome, God is putting Paul in a position to meet and evangelize Caesar's household in spite of any missteps by Paul.

Philippians 1:12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

Philippians 1:13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

If you were sitting in front of me, I know someone would ask, "What exactly is the praetorian guard?" From Wikipedia:

"The Praetorian Guard (Latin: cohortēs praetōriae) was an elite unit of the Imperial Roman army that served as personal bodyguards and intelligence agents for the Roman emperors."

Philippians 1:14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

The implication is that Paul has given the gospel to members of this elite unit without suffering any repercussions. So others are embolden to communicate Bible information without fear.

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Philippians 4:21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you.

Philippians 4:22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

Thomas Constable says:

“All the saints in Rome sent their greetings through Paul to the Philippians. Some of these saints were employees of the imperial government ("those of Caesar's household"), not the palace slaves. Paul had already referred to the praetorian guards some of whom had evidently become believers (1:13). Since Philippi as a colony had close ties with Rome it is likely that some of the Roman Christians had friends in the Philippian church.²”

Ephesians chapter 6 illustrates the believers assets to be used in the Angelic Conflict. Perhaps Paul is more aware of the intensity of this conflict in his own life.

Then there are the “pastoral” epistles to Timothy and Titus. Perhaps Paul realizes that he will not live much longer. His mission changes to not just proclaiming the good news but also preparing pastors for the challenges of the ministry after he is gone.

And then there is humility.

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

² <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/philippians.pdf> (2023 version)

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Philippians 4:12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

So, as a result of Paul's imprisonment he has perhaps experienced a focus on the Angelic Conflict, preparation of pastors to take the place of the apostles and maybe even a renewed emphasis on humility.