



# MAIN COMMENTARIES ON 'ROMANS'

## REASONS FOR THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

We need to ask an important question about the Epistle to the Romans: why did St. Paul — who had never visited the church in Rome — write to the Romans? The Apostle himself never directly answers this question, but we can find several reasons by looking at the things going on in his life, and in the church in Rome at that time.

First, St. Paul tells the Romans that he wanted to visit them many times, but had been prevented from making the trip (Romans 1:13). He wanted to go to Rome to “impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established” (1:11). Some scholars claim that this means St. Paul wanted to give a thorough explanation of his theology before he died, but that is not what he really meant. Instead, St. Paul knew that the Romans had never had the benefit of an Apostle teaching them about the faith. He therefore wanted to go to Rome to spend some time teaching the members of the church. One reason for the Epistle is to explain to the Romans before he arrived the Gospel message he wanted them to know. St. John Chrysostom explains the importance of Paul both writing and visiting the Romans: “Since he had not yet been present, he bringeth the men to good order in two ways, both by the profitableness of his letter and by the expectation of his presence.”

Directly related to this is a second reason: St. Paul wanted to engage in evangelism in both Rome and Spain (Romans 1:15; 15:28). Since Rome would be the base from which St. Paul would engage in this evangelism, it was important for the Christians in Rome to understand the evangelistic message he intended to share.

A third reason is that St. Paul was informing the Romans that he was coming not only to work, but also to enjoy the company of the Christians in Rome (Romans 1:12; 15:30, 32). The Apostle had just been through a stressful time dealing with problems in the Corinthian church: he wanted to rest and be encouraged by the members of the Roman church. Ultimately, however, instead of being able to rest, St. Paul spent two years under house arrest in Rome.

A fourth reason for the Epistle involves the Roman church itself. Many scholars believe that there was tension between Gentile and Jewish Christians in the church (see Romans 14:1-15:13): the Gentiles were in control of the church because the Jews had only recently returned from a five-year exile from Rome. The Epistle spends a great deal of time explaining St. Paul’s theology as it relates to these two groups in order to bring them together in the Body of Christ.