

Continued from Letter to the Romans Part 3 -

The entire conquest of the Roman Empire was not military. It was not wanting power or land. It took all of those things, but basically, it was their obsession with keeping their city protected. Isn't that fascinating? All the rest was a result of that, and they built up this mystique of the city of Rome. If you lived in the city of Rome, you had unique privileges. You were a citizen of the city of Rome. You could not be crucified. You could do this, you could that—all sorts of privileges. And everybody pledged their allegiance to Rome. It's very difficult for you and me to appreciate the power of the concept of Rome, its influence on your life and mine today. It was like a cult. You've heard the word chauvinist—one who is totally enamored with, obsessed with an idea. Well, this was what was going on in that day. Rome—I don't want to use the word myth, but I don't know how to describe it any other way.

Rome, the city to be protected. Rome, above and beyond all men, above Caesars, above armies, above everything—Rome. Rome. The Roman salute was a pledge to guard the city of Rome, and you never asked why. Like a religious cult that does weird things, you never ask why. It's Rome. There is a certain thing that becomes so sacred you never ask why. There's no reason behind it. It just is, and you better say it, and you better do it, and you better believe it, because if you don't, you're in big trouble. You've got to honor the city of Rome. It was an incredible thing. It's very difficult to describe, but that attitude is what came over into the Roman Catholic Church, and it went from a city to a kind of denomination. It was, at all costs, the church. You don't question the church. You don't ask about the church. You don't fight the church. You obey the church. That was the attitude of Rome. You don't ask about Rome. You don't question Rome. You obey Rome, or you're in big trouble. That came right over into the Roman Catholic Church, and cults today pick that up; and Baptists pick it up. We're Baptists. You don't ask why you're a Baptist, what a Baptist is. Baptist—that just ends it. Baptist. Methodists do it. Do the cell ministries do that? We're the cell ministries. Of course, it's very dangerous.

Now, Octavia, who became Augustus Caesar, made a boast, and if I'm not mistaken—Jiminy Crickets—I believe he became Caesar in 15 or 14 B.C. Somebody prove me wrong here, would you? He did something in 15 or 14 B.C. Would somebody look it up and tell me more? So, who's got anything? A Bible dictionary? Tomorrow, come tell me if I'm right or wrong. Anyway, I remember 14 or 15 B.C., something or other, but he made this boast. He said, “When I became Caesar, Rome was stone, and when my reign ended, Rome was marble.” He had turned it from rock to marble. Now, Julius Caesar had started this, but all the Caesars thereafter for a hundred years, part of what they did was build monuments and rebuild the city. The city was just transformed incredibly by Augustus, and after that, every Caesar felt like they needed to do the same thing. Now, do you know what I'm talking about? I'm talking about building aqueducts all the way from Africa and running water all the way up and down all of the areas. Aqueducts brought water all the way down from Switzerland—we'd call it Switzerland today—to feed the city.

Huge fountains were built by Augustus—water fountains. It's called the City of Water. Have any of you ever been there? It's called the Eternal City because they figured it would never collapse. The downtown main part of the city, the marketplace, and the Forum were built

elaborately out of marble. Wide streets with colonnades so that they could march down, bearing their new slaves and new captives when they went out and conquered somebody. Downtown city had very broad streets, very large avenues—probably the best-built roads that man has ever built in history; they still are using them right there, the Italians, today, whereas we tear up our freeways every 15 years, those things were sunk about yep deep in stone, and they just don't ever wear out. By the way, you can do that when you have millions of slaves of free labor to do it. The population of this beautiful city is about a million. There are around 50,000 Jews in it, and I suspect that at this moment, there are probably around 50 to 100 Christians. It couldn't be much more than a couple of hundred. Some people have tried to put it at 1,000; I think that's way too many at the time of the writing of the book of Romans.

I will also tell you that these are high-quality people, because that church grew very rapidly. Between 54 and 64, a period of just 10 years, they grew enough that the Roman emperor himself knew they were in town. In 10 years! And this is a town that has literally thousands of religions. People come from all over the world. Have you ever been to London recently? I don't know if you have or not, but London today is a bazaar of nations. You don't ever see an Englishman on the streets of downtown London anymore. You see everything else on earth. Well, if you walked into the city of Rome, there are the Romans, but people come there from all over the world to do their trading and to set up businesses, and every one of them brings a god with them. Every god is welcomed, and they figure this god is kind of like this god, so they're the same god—you worship him. Worship any god you want to; it doesn't matter a bit. It's a cultural thing. They're all accepted.

They have a problem with one group because they're different. They'll only worship one God. They don't particularly like these people. But these people—mark this, this is a little-known fact—these people have the second to the largest banking system in the world, and there ain't nothing you can do about it. They got money, and they're traders, and they're good traders, and whether you like them or not and their peculiarities—the way they look, the way they talk, and their funny religion—nonetheless, they're holding a good part of the Roman Empire together because they're basically honest businessmen. They have a bank filled with gold, and they have the second most powerful center of gold and banking in the world. Now, who are they? The Jews. Do you know where their bank is? Where? Inside the temple. Kept inside the temple is their bank—that which the Lord Jesus turned over.

It's the second-largest banking system in the world, so they have privileges in that city at times. At other times, they are persecuted. I want you to see them—Rome, Italy—a city of one million people, people from all over the planet there, every kind of person there is, temples everywhere to different gods, huge, beautiful streets, but what you and I would call an alley off of the main streets—they are filthy. Garbage is never collected; it's thrown in the streets from upstairs and out the front door into these little alleyways. They have a little trough about yep big, and that sits there and rots. It gets covered with flies, and it stays until the rain washes it away into the Tiber River. There were lots of jokes the Romans told about never walking at night, never walking the streets of Rome at night, and never walking them during the day. At night, you will get—now this is all in rhyme—at night you will get mugged, robbed, and possibly killed by thieves, and in the daytime, somebody will probably throw a brick out their window into the street and knock and crush your head. The point was that there was no safe time to walk the alleyways of Rome, Italy. I want you to know that

these brothers and sisters are not living on the grand, open byways and highways of that town. They are down those little filthy alley streets, and little bitty—excuse me using this term to express it—God-forsaken, little bitty rooms with little bitty windows.

There are a few of those buildings that have remained today. Some of them went all the way up like this. They're called *insulas*, and we get the word insulation from it, don't ask me why, with little bitty windows in them, and people would come from all over the world and go into those places, these tiny rooms, and pack themselves in. See a great, beautiful, majestic city of marble as long as you stayed on the main concourses. See pitiful, tragic, pitiful, horrible, smelly places in the back streets where it is dangerous to come out at night or day.

See the bazaars, see the marketplaces, see the trading, see men making deals for spices, for wine, for jars and vases, for herbs and spices. See the wheat markets of the world being auctioned off there. See the slaves being bought and sold. See that the city has grown to seven hills. Look down the road and see 120 acres being cleared by young Nero. At this moment, this is taking place right now—he is building himself a new palace, and the jokes were going around that day, if that house gets any bigger, there will be no Rome. Stand somewhere where you can see and look and see the gigantic villas off away. There are the powerhouses of the world. Those are men who control enormous amounts of gold. They have dozens, if not hundreds, of slaves working and doing their bidding. These are the people that Hollywood always depicts. There are only a few of them, a few dozen, a few hundred. See the soldiers everywhere with their swords, and know this: in a city of one million people, would you like to guess how many of them are slaves? Now, we're talking the bottom rung here—slaves. There was a census taken; we know how many there were. Does anybody want to guess? In a city of a million people, how many of them were owned slaves? Five hundred thousand of them—one half. Half of the people were slaves. This is why this thing of “read your Bible,” this never did—I mean, I'm for reading your Bible, don't misunderstand—we as Christians have never faced the fact of illiteracy in the first century, and I'm only saying that to defend an indwelling Lord. That's the only reason I ever bring the subject up—it's to defend an indwelling Lord. Those people had to have a Word within them because they could not read, and they could not write.

Now, that's the slaves. That has nothing to do with the peasants, the poverty-stricken people who slept in the alleyways and the streets, and who lived on just enough to buy wheat and millet. Millet and wheat were the two. There were some oats and some of that stuff, and the seven-grain cereal, but that's about what those people lived on. And there's a very small middle class made up of Jews, Greek merchants, and some of the others. Then you have the slightly more wealthy, and then you have the extremely wealthy who control that city and most of the known world. And there are the seventy senators in a building who meet right down near the center of the main Roman forum.

And there is, of course, Caesar himself, to whom anybody who is a Roman citizen—do you understand what that word “Roman” means now? —a citizen of the city of Rome—who can appeal to if he's about to be sentenced to death. Can you see the city? Can you understand why Paul wants the gospel there? You can reach any race, and this is where the power is. This is New York, London, Moscow, and Hong Kong combined, though in Washington and Paris. It's the city of the world. And beginning with right now, you live there. Okay? Beginning right

this minute, you live there. How'd you get there? Boats, okay, and you walk. How did you get there? Paul sent you a letter and asked you to move there. Were you excited? Yeah, you were really excited. What about when you moved into that insula? How did you feel about that? Kind of wilted your tail feathers, didn't it?

Okay, brothers and sisters, I'm going to tell you what we're going to do this week. It's really simple. Paul reaches back throughout his entire 18–20 years as an apostle and a church planter, and he tells them all about the riches of the gospel, until he gets to chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15. Not chapter 16; 12, 13, 14, and 15. There, he addresses living together in community. That's what he does, and we're going to find out what your problems are in Rome, at least. Some of you are really characters, a few of you are really, really troublemakers, some of you are neat people, but I don't sometimes wonder why Paul asks some of you people to go to Rome, because you really are turkeys. We're going to find out what the little community of believers in Rome, Italy, faced, and you're going to be really surprised, I think, to discover how closely related the church in Rome among the Italians in 56 A.D.—how much they look like the brothers and sisters who gather on Claiborne Street in the gigantic city of Chicago, Illinois.

We're going to see if we can get a little help from the great church planter Paul of Tarsus in our daily problems, in our lives, in our psychological hang-ups, and in our trying to get along with one another, and can't. I'm going to ask you to read 12, 13, 14, and 15 if you possibly can tomorrow. I know that's almost impossible, but we're going to take Tuesday off. Try to come in here by Wednesday, having read it. I'm going to seek, as I have just now, to put you into the spirit of the city of Rome in the meantime, and I will close with this, and we will let the people with the TV set go.

I'm going to tell you folks who are watching on television what we're about to do. We're going to take names right now of these folks. Not all of us will be able to do it, but I'm going to give some of you some names so that we can talk to you about some of the problems you're creating in the church. And the rest of you can take names if you want to. Your new converts will have... if you don't get one of the names, would you like to take a name? Invent one—like Plinicus, and Gripicus, and Pouticus, and Guticus, and Pesiacundus—and if you can think of something that might some way match you, maybe you want to take the name Dictatoricus. I want to hear that one. What was it—Kamikas? Maybe I should ask Brother Alex to help me name some of these people, or maybe I will ask the fellowship here to name you, but we're all going to get a name. Everybody who's willing will get a name. All right, those of you on the television screen, I just want to say to you before we leave you that the letter to the Romans was not written to you—it was written to a church, and *there's not a promise in it that's for an individual. It's for the body of Christ*. These people did not come to church on Sunday morning at 11 a.m. They had piled in with one another, and they were living with one another 365 days a year in a strange and foreign land, and they had added to their numbers all sorts of weird people called Italians.

And if there's an Italian in this room—okay, there is an Italian in this room, okay—I will refrain from calling you by your...what do we call that...your ethnic, the ethnic slur that they put on Italians. By the way, they do that with everybody. I don't know what they are, but I know what Frenchmen are called. Do you know what Frenchmen are called? Frogs. You

didn't know that? Because they roll their words, and every time they come to an "r," and they speak down here. And so, the Englishmen always call them frogs. So, we all have ugly names. But anyway, these Greeks and these Jews and these Galatians have poured in here, and now they're having to put up with... I'll use the word once—Dagos. Alright, I didn't mean that in any unkind way. I'm trying to get you to understand. You've got a mixture of races and cultures here, and they are all trying to follow the Lord, and they've got problems, beaucoup. You've got problems with the brothers who are Greek and can't get along with the Gauls. You've got the Jewish brothers and sisters having a real hard time running around with uncircumcised, heathen, unwashed, unclean, Gentiles. But it's still the church. It's still the church, and we're going to have to learn how to live with one another, and that's what Romans 12, 13, 14, and 15 are about. We bid you goodbye. Alright.