

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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RIGHTLY DIVIDING ROMANS

The exhortation of the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul in regard to rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2: 15) is one that no serious Bible student should ignore. Those who handle God's Word in a superficial manner, taking a bit here and there as it suits their purposes and fancies, feel no compulsion in regard to right division. But the one whose goal is ever to find the truth that God has set forth in His book will demonstrate his faith by taking God at His word and responding accordingly. His commitment will always be: "I must rightly divide the word of truth."

Every statement in the Bible demands interpretation. There can be no exceptions to this rule. If the interpretation is so simple that it lies on the surface, that is well and good. True interpretation is nothing more than a correct understanding of that which has been said. The sincere student always asks two questions of everything he reads in the Bible. The first is, "What does it say?" The second is, "What does it mean?"

Quite often it is far more difficult to discover what has been said than it is to find what the thing said means. The book we call the Bible is to us an English version of what was originally said in other languages. In other words, an English Bible is simply the result of certain men saying to us this is what the original writers meant by what they said in Hebrew or Greek. Therefore, an English Bible is one long explanation of what was originally said. So, let no one despise explanations or interpretations. If they do, then let them cast away their Bibles.

Readers of the King James Version are often found trying to understand the meaning of statements which are sometimes nothing more than garbled renderings of that spoken by the Spirit of God in the original language. The interpretation of a mistranslation results in a secondary error and confounds the original confusion. There is no task more fruitless than to try to find true meaning in some translator's mistake.

There are times when we can never arrive at the truth declared until we are willing to go back or to be led back to God's inspired original. If we cannot go on our own, then we must be willing to follow honest and unbiased men who will lead us there, and while they are doing this will point out and explain each step they are taking. Once we know with some degree of certainty what the Holy Spirit has said, we are ready to proceed with the task of finding what it means. And let all who study the Word remember that it is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but even kings could gain honor by searching it out (Prov. 25:2). Do not shrink from this task which sometimes borders on drudgery.

The true understanding of many difficult passages in the New Testament will always be based upon the principle of rightly-dividing the word of truth. There are entire books in the Bible that will never yield their full message of truth to us until we recognize the character of the people to whom they were written and the divine administration under which they were written. Paul's letter to the Romans is one of these.

The time of the writing of the Roman epistle can be firmly established. It was written at that point in the Acts period marked by the events recorded in Acts 20:4. Thus it was written under the administration of God which prevailed in the Acts period. However, church theologians would very much like to make this a "church epistle" so they somewhat blatantly concoct the idea that there was an "organized church" in Rome at that time, great in size composed of a minor number of believing Jews and a major number of believing Gentiles who are especially in view in this letter. However, there are no facts anywhere to support this concept, just a lot of baseless suppositions, and these have led to the ignoring of the evidence that is at hand. This great inverted pyramid starts with one point of truth found early in the Acts record.

According to Acts 2:5,10 there were "**dwelling** (not visiting) **in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven,**" and among these were some described as "repatriated (*epidemeo*) Romans, both Jews and proselytes." Beginning with this fact these imaginers of history come to the crude conclusion that when the feast of Pentecost was over these Jews returned to Rome and undertook at once to become heralds of the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles in that great city. They even attribute to them great success so that a great church was formed to which Paul sent this Epistle.

Strange indeed that Paul seems to have known nothing of these valiant witnesses, never referring to them, ignoring altogether their efforts. Neither did those who were "the foremost of Jews" (chief of the Jews) know anything about these men and the gospel they are supposed to have proclaimed. Their declaration to Paul was that "**concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against**" (Acts 28:22).

The word **epidemeo** means to come back home from a foreign residence. This could be for a visit or to dwell. This is the word used of these Roman Jews who were present on the day of Pentecost. What Luke speaks of here are Israelites who were born or reared in Rome but who had returned to the land 'of their fathers and were now permanently settled in and around Jerusalem in order to end their days and be buried there.

One needs to recognize the high regard and love that all the dispersed ones had for Jerusalem in order to fully understand this. R.C.H. Lenski, a most capable Biblical historian, says: "How dearly these Jews loved Jerusalem is widened by expressions such as this: 'Everyone who is buried in the land of Israel is in as good case as if he were buried under the altar.' " Therefore, the idea that these repatriated Jews left Jerusalem after Pentecost to herald the gospel in Rome is pure moonshine. And the great church they are supposed to have produced never existed. Furthermore, the man who wrote "Render therefore to all their dues, honor to whom honor is due" (Rom. 13:7) would never have ignored the work these men are supposed to have done.

The Roman census records indicate that at the time Paul wrote the Roman epistle there were 5,500,000 Israelites who made up the diaspora, the scattered ones. These dispersed ones are spoken of in Daniel 9:7 as being "**far off, through all the countries whither Thou has driven them;**" referred to by Isaiah: "Peace, peace to him that is far off (57:20); by the Lord Jesus when He said: "**Other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice**" (John 10:16). There were 100,000 of these "far off ones," these "other sheep" living in the city of Rome. **It has truly been said of Rome that it was the capital of Israel in the dispersion. And it was to this company of Israelites that the Roman epistle was addressed.**

The character of these Jews can be discerned from the words of Paul before Herod Agrippa when he said: "**Unto which promise our twelve tribes earnestly serving God day and night hope to attain**" (Acts 26:7) and from his more direct word concerning them: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1 :8). Thus it was to devout Jews that this letter is addressed. Therefore, any expositor, commentator, teacher, or interpreter of this epistle who fails to recognize this fact will be forever bringing forth incorrect explanations of the things said in it.

The truth of this is firmly established by reading carefully this epistle. How could this have been written to anyone but Israelites when Paul says in 2: 17: "**Behold, you are called** (named, denominated, positioned) **a Jew, and are resting in the law.**" These words had to be spoken to Israelites.

Following this Paul asks the questions: "**What advantage then is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?**" (Rom. 3:1), and he provides an immediate answer: "Much every way!" or as it could be more forcefully rendered: "The advantage is great from every standpoint."

Here Paul is speaking in the Acts period and the truth he declare_ was true at that time; This is not true today when under God's present display of grace the Jew stands before God on the basis of equality with all men. **Grace cannot show favoritism, else it would not be grace at all.**

Then as if anticipating the question: "What is the chief advantage?" he declares, "**Their chief advantage is that unto them was committed the oracles of God**" (Rom. 3:2).

An "oracle" is that which speaks or he who speaks in behalf of God, and here it speaks of every book in the Bible that has been produced up to that time. Simple and honest logic should make it plain to all that if 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and now, in process, the Roman epistle have been entrusted to Gentile churches, then any advantage the Jews may have had has been erased, even before Paul wrote this letter. However, following this there was a dispensational change, indicated by Paul's words in Acts 28:28, so that the next oracle that comes from God is entrusted to an individual named Timothy.

Romans 4: 1 settles the matter beyond all question. Here, in speaking directly to those to whom this letter is sent, Paul asks the question: "**What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, hath found.**" These are strange words indeed if Paul were speaking to Gentiles, as many would like to have us believe. These words taken alone are enough to show that the Roman epistle was written to those who were direct descendants of Abraham, men who were in line to inherit the promises made to him.

The words of Romans 1:1 confirm all that has been set forth: "**Know ye not brethren,** (for I speak to them that know the law,) **how the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth!**" Such words were not intended for Gentiles, and these words must always be kept in mind when this difficult chapter is explained or interpreted.

In view of what has been said, let no one say that I believe that Romans is Jewish or that it is not for us. I believe that Romans is Divine, not Jewish, that every bit of truth in it is for me. However, part of that truth is that it was written to Israelites in the dispersion who lived in Rome. This fact must be accepted before it can be correctly interpreted. The correct interpretation will be dealt with in a subsequent study.

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