

[Preface to Romans, An Interpretive Outline by David N. Steel and Curtis C. Thomas, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963. xiii-ix.]

PREFACE

This second half of the twentieth century is an age of depression – not financial depression, but spiritual depression. Ecclesiastically there is wide-spread apostasy. The great bulk of religious literature published by, recommended by, or circulated in the major denominations undermine or overtly attack the truthfulness of God's Word, the Bible. This is easily accomplished, for spot checks indicate that most church members have very little Biblical knowledge to undermine and do not much care whether the Bible is true or not.

Outside the visible Church, and this comprises at least half of the population of the United States, there is not only towering indifference to divine truth, but there are also organized groups who try to eradicate all ideas of God from our national life. They aim to use the government to suppress Christianity.

On the other end of the spectrum are the small denominations and independent congregations which adhere to the Bible as their standard. They are not completely illiterate in Biblical matters as the others are; but their level of knowledge, most unfortunately, does not equal that of the immediate followers of Luther, Calvin, and Knox, nor of the Puritans of the seventeenth century. Of course there are exceptions to the general rule: some small groups concentrate earnestly on Bible study; but by and large there is more dilute milk for babes than the strong meat needed for Christian vigor. This is an age of religious depression and spiritual debility.

For a first step to remedy this situation, apart from an intensive study of John's Gospel, there is nothing so profitable as a series of sermons or class discussions on Paul's epistle to the Romans. If any minister wants to strengthen his people, he can hardly do better than to give them a massive dose of Romans.

Someone objects that Romans is too profound, too difficult, and horrors! too theological! But theology is precisely what the world needs, because the world needs God. The object studied by theology is God, just as the object studied by botany is plant life. Now, a study of God will understandably involve difficulties. But Romans was not too difficult or too theological for the Holy Spirit to inspire Paul to send it to the Christians in Rome. These Christians were often of the lower classes of Roman society. Some were slaves; perhaps some could neither read nor write, none had graduated from an American high school. But they could and they did study the letter Paul had sent them. In view of this, the modern American ought to discard his inferiority complex.

Yes, there are difficulties. Some passages, such as Romans 5:12-23, are very difficult. But for all of that, Paul organized his material so logically that any semi-intelligent high school graduate can easily carry the outline in his head. The twentieth century Christian therefore has no excuse, for Romans is God's message to all of us.

And it is just what this debilitated age needs. Each verse is a concentrated vitamin pill designed to cure modernistic rickets.

The present book has been put together with great care by its authors. No doubt there are mistakes in it; the authors do not claim to be inspired apostles; nonetheless with conscientious attention to detail, both of form and content, they have spared neither time nor typewriter in producing a manuscript suited to our needs. It is not a bare outline, such as mine in *The Biblical Expositor*; nor is it the immortal 716 page commentary of Charles Hodge. It is neither too long nor too short, but is just what is needed for a series of sermons or for several months of lessons in a Bible class.

There is one more point to be made about the difficulty of learning the message of Romans. A medieval story tells of a burden which gives strength to the man who lifts it, so that the heavier the burden is, the easier it is to carry it. God has imposed the burden of his Word upon us. He did not send it to a hierarchy of professional priests who stand between us and himself. God addressed the Bible to the people. But with the burden the Lord also sends the Spirit of Truth to lead us into all truth. As we read the inspired message, we can and we ought to seek illumination from the Holy Ghost. He was its original author and he is willing to help us through its difficulties.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain.
God is his own Interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

GORDON H. CLARK