

**ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE
ROMANS: NEWLY TRANSLATED
AND EXPLAINED FROM A
MISSIONARY POINT OF VIEW**

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St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Newly Translated and Explained from a Missionary Point of View by J. W. Colenso

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BY THE

RIGHT REV. J. W. COLENZO, D.D.,

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1863.

TO THE HONOURABLE
THE SECRETARY FOR NATIVE AFFAIRS
TO THE NATAL GOVERNMENT,
THEOPHILUS SHEPSTONE, Esq.

MY DEAR FRIEND---

THIS book contains the substance of many conversations, which I have had with you from time to time, upon the subject of teaching the truths of Christianity to the natives of this colony, and those of other heathen countries. The teaching of the great Apostle to the Gentiles is here applied to some questions, which daily arise in Missionary labours among the heathen, more directly than is usual with those commentators, who have not been engaged personally in such work, but have written from a very different point of view, in the midst of a state of advanced civilisation and settled Christianity. Hence they have usually passed by altogether, or only touched very lightly upon, many points, which are of great importance to Missionaries, but which seemed to be of no immediate practical interest for themselves or their readers.

The views, which I have here advanced, are the results of seven years of Missionary experience, as well

as of many years of previous close study of this Epistle. I had hoped that this book might have been of use with reference to that great work in Zululand to which, as it seemed lately, the Providence of God was more directly calling you—a work which promised immense results of blessing to the natives of this part of Africa, and in which it would have been my joy and pride to have rendered you any assistance in my power. I cannot but believe that the time is not far distant, when the singular abilities, which God has given you, for influencing the native mind,—to which, under the Divine blessing, this colony has been mainly indebted for the order and peace, which, during so many years, have been maintained, within its border,—will be called into yet more active exercise in advancing the civilisation of these tribes.

Meanwhile, I beg you to accept this book, as a token of sincere esteem and friendship, and as a pledge that, if God will, I shall gladly be associated with you, at some future day, in carrying on such a work.

I am, my dear Friend,

Yours, very truly,

J. W. NATAL.

INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE we can enter fully into the Apostle's meaning in this Epistle to the Romans, and see the very gist of his argument, and the line of thought he is following throughout, it is necessary that we should have a clear idea of the persons to whom, and the circumstances under which, it was written. This, which is desirable, of course, for the elucidation of all his Epistles, is absolutely essential here. It is impossible that any one should understand his language in this Epistle, even in the Greek, much less in the English translation, who has not realised to himself, in some measure, the state of things at Rome, at the time when the Apostle wrote, who does not keep that state of things in his mind all along, as he reads his words.

To what class of persons, then, was this Epistle written? We call it the Epistle 'to the Romans,' that is, of course, to the Christian believers then living at Rome. But who were these? And how did there happen to be any Christians at Rome at this time? It is natural to imagine a Christian Church at Rome, definitely formed and fully

developed, like those at Corinth, Antioch, or Ephesus, or, in later times, at Rome itself. And, probably, most readers who have not bestowed much thought upon the subject, would take for granted that these 'Romans,' who are here addressed, were like the Thessalonians, Corinthians, and others, mostly converts, made directly from the *heathen* world, in the midst of the teeming population of the Imperial City. When St. Paul writes (Rom. i. 7) 'to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints,' and speaks to them (i. 5, 6) of his having received apostleship 'for the obedience to the faith *among all nations, among whom also are ye,*' and tells them further on (i. 13) that he 'had oftentimes purposed to come unto them, that he might have some fruit among them, also, as even among *other Gentiles,*' it is plain that he is not writing to Jews, but to Gentiles, —to men who were not merely living at Rome, as numbers of Jews were at this time, but who were really men of the 'nations,' true Romans born and bred, and who had had, most probably, their early training in heathenism.

But, when we look at the Epistle itself, we are at once struck with the peculiarity of its style, and of its main subject-matter. The first eleven chapters would seem to be addressed to Jews, rather than to Christians. By far the greater part of the Epistle assumes in the reader a very familiar acquaintance with Jewish history, and Jewish practices, and Jewish modes of thought, such as no mere ordinary convert from heathenism, especially at a time when there were only manuscripts, and the Books of the Old Testament were not in every one's hands, could possibly have possessed. St. Paul passes rapidly from one

point to another, as if sure of carrying his reader along with him, without stopping for a moment to explain more clearly, to the Roman mind, any one of his allusions. The Jew's 'resting in the Law,' his 'making his boast in God,' his confidence in circumcision, the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in some of its minuter details,—the destruction of Pharaoh,—extracts from the Psalms and the Prophets,—all these are brought in, when the argument requires it, without any doubt seeming to cross his mind as to the possibility of his illustrations being unintelligible, and his reasoning failing to take effect, because of any want of acquaintance, on the part of those to whom he wrote, with the main facts of Jewish history. In fact, in some places, he writes directly as to Jews—he sets up a Jew to argue with—as in (ii. 17), 'Behold! thou art called a Jew, &c.,' and in (iv. 1), 'What shall we say then that Abraham, our father, hath found?'

And yet the expressions quoted from the first chapter, and other passages, such as (xi. 13) 'I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office,' and the general tone of the Epistle in many parts, forbid our supposing that he was writing merely or mainly to Jews. How then are we to account for this fact, that in this particular Epistle there is so much reference to Jewish matters, more than in all his other Epistles put together, unless St. Paul wrote also the Epistle to the Hebrews? How is it to be explained that, addressing himself here distinctly to 'Gentiles,' 'Men of the Nations,' Christians of Roman birth, he yet all along assumes in his readers such a perfect knowledge of Jewish matters,

such a strong sympathy with the Jewish mind and feelings?

In order to give the answer to this question, we must consider what light the Scripture records throw upon the origin of the Roman Church. And here we shall come at once upon this inquiry, namely, Was there, in fact, *any* Christian Church at Rome at all, at this time, distinct and definitely marked off from the Jewish community? There would seem to have been none whatever, for the following reasons:

(1) It is certain that no apostle had as yet been at Rome, or taken any prominent part in founding such a Church, or setting in order its affairs. Had it been otherwise, St. Paul must have made some reference to him in this Epistle. And, besides, he tells these very Romans (xv. 20), that he 'strove so to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was already preached, lest he should be *building on another man's foundation.*'

(2) Among the numerous salutations in the last chapter, in which twenty-eight persons are named, and others indicated, to whom, as believers at Rome, the Epistle must be considered to be especially addressed, there is no reference to any kind of Church government as existing among them, to any ruling power in the Christian community, to any presiding or officiating person, whether bishop, presbyter, or deacon. It would have been so natural, in chapter xiii., where he enjoins obedience to the higher *civil* powers, though these were heathen, to have thrown in a word or two, as to their duty also to submit themselves to those, who had the 'rule over them' in spiritual matters, who were