

### RENDER UNTO CAESAR-Part 1

May 22, 2016

The New Testament contains several epistles written by various inspired men, to members of the Lord's church. Some theologians have referred to one such letter, *Romans*, as the greatest epistle that the apostle Paul penned, and Roy Deaver rightly referred to the book as "God's plan for man's righteousness" (*Biblical Notes*, 1992). The emphasis of the letter is to show that man can be justified in the sight of God, and the manner in which that takes place. Christianity is a learned religion, and mankind must learn how to be righteous, in order to be able to exist within God's presence.

The Bible student will certainly notice Paul's discussion of "righteousness," and his theme throughout the letter demonstrates how mankind is able to stand before God in righteousness, but that only through the Gospel is it possible for all people to be justified (Rom. 1:16-17). In the first eight chapters, Paul presented the proof for his thesis, in chapters nine through eleven, he discussed the Jewish problem, and in chapters twelve through sixteen, he addressed some important practical matters. Chapter thirteen of the book of Romans falls into the section of practical matters, and in the beginning verses of chapter thirteen, Paul described civil government as it related to the lives of all men, especially to Christians. The passage to be considered, in this article, is Romans 13:1-8.

To understand all that one can about the original recipients of the *Romans* epistle, is to better understand Paul's instruction of the topics addressed, and it is particularly useful in understanding the present passage. Most Bible students have learned of Paul's great desire to visit the church in Rome, to evangelize the areas to the west of the city (Rom. 15:22-24), and it appears, to make Rome a base of operation, in much the same way Antioch was in the east. In his commentary on *Romans*, Everett F. Harrison makes some interesting observations concerning the church there. He surmised that if Paul simply wanted to visit the members at Rome, why would he send such a lengthy letter, instead of a note simply informing them of his intended visit? It must have been that he desired to make the city and church a base of operation for his evangelistic efforts to the west. Another factor he mentioned was Paul's desire for the church to pray for his safe deliverance from the hands of unbelievers, but what would that necessarily have to do with the letter? Harrison believed that Paul was making arrangements for the spread of the Gospel to the western part of the world, in the event that he was murdered before he could evangelize the area himself; he wrote a systematic and comprehensive letter, informing the reader of God's plan of redemption, so the church would have the appropriate knowledge to convert lost souls to Christ.

Those reasons put forth by Harrison are very plausible, but the Bible reader must never overlook the fact that Romans is full of teachings that all congregations need. To what extent Paul was familiar with the situation that existed in the church at Rome is not known, but it is very likely that he had information concerning their present needs. Harrison believes that Paul's general address of the topics, was so he would not betray any confidences he may have had with those who had an intimate knowledge of the Roman circumstances.

However, it is very unlikely that the original readers of the letter would not make a connection between the subject matter of the letter and the problems that existed among them. There must have also been tension on some level between the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, and Paul certainly appealed to the fact that both needed salvation.

Therefore, it is understandable that they would grasp the intended meaning of the letter, which would better equip them to bring about the changes Paul desired, as they incorporated his teachings. The members of the church at Rome would have had the appropriate understanding of Paul's intentions and the improvements he expected by the time he arrived. Understanding that the society in which they lived had reached a point of utter decay (Rom. 1:18-32), shows the necessity of his correspondence.

The Cordova Connection will continue next week with the exposition of Romans 13:1-8, and study into rendering unto Caesar.