

THE MESSAGE OF

ROMANS

DAVID K. BERNARD

The Message of Romans

By David K. Bernard

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I.

Prologue

(1:1-17)

Personal introduction

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Prologue (1:1-17)

The introductory portion of Paul's epistle to the Romans consists of an expanded greeting passage, a brief discussion of Paul's travel plans and purpose for writing, and a powerful statement of the theme of the epistle.

A. Salutation (1:1-7)

(1) Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God (2) which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, (3) concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, (4) and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, (5) through whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, (6) among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; (7) To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Book of Romans begins with a salutation patterned after a typical letter in New Testament times. Such a letter began with the sender's name, the recipient's name, and a statement of greeting. Paul expanded this form and gave it a rich Christian phrasing.

The Message of Romans

Verse 1. Paul first introduced himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, a phrase reminiscent of the one used by Old Testament prophets: “servant of Jehovah.” The Greek word is *doulos*, literally meaning “a slave.” Paul’s highest calling and noblest mark of identity was to be a devoted slave of Jesus Christ.

Next, Paul described himself as called by God to be an apostle, a title which literally means “one sent,” or a messenger. While Paul did not claim to be one of the Twelve (I Corinthians 15:5), he was sent by the church and the Holy Spirit as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-4; 14:14; Galatians 2:7-9). He was called to be an apostle and set apart for the preaching of God’s gospel. No mere mortal could give him this ministry; he received it from God Himself (Galatians 1:1, 15-16).

The gospel is literally “the good news” about salvation. It is not of man, but its source is God. The good news is that Jesus came to this world as God manifested in flesh, died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

Verse 2. This gospel is not new; God promised the gospel beforehand through the Old Testament prophets. Indeed, the Old Testament predicted Christ’s birth (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6), suffering and death for our sins (Isaiah 53), burial (Psalm 16:10), and resurrection (Psalm 16:9-11; 110:1), as well as the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and the outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-29). The Book of Romans takes great care to base all its major doctrinal points on the Old Testament. (See, for example, 1:17, 3:10-21, and 4:1-8.)

Verse 3. The gospel concerns God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all. The term *Son* refers to the mani-

festation of God in flesh. As a man, Jesus is the Son of God—the manifestation of God in flesh—because the Spirit of God caused the conception to take place in Mary’s womb (Luke 1:35). As to His divine nature, Jesus is the one God revealed in the Old Testament. As to His human nature, Jesus is David’s descendant (Matthew 1:1; Luke 3:31), begotten of God and born of Mary.

Verse 4. Christ’s resurrection from the dead declared or made known to all that He was indeed the Son of God. Supernatural power effected the resurrection, specifically the power of the Spirit of holiness. The Spirit of holiness is none other than Christ’s own holy, divine nature, for He raised Himself from the dead (John 2:19-21). Verses 3-4 contrast Christ’s humanity (“according to the flesh”) with His deity (“according to the Spirit of holiness”). Christ’s “Spirit of holiness” is the Holy Spirit—the two phrases are linguistically equivalent. In fact, “the Lord is the Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:17). “The dead” is plural in Greek, denoting that the resurrection of Christ’s body is only the first of many physical resurrections to take place by the power of His Spirit (Romans 8:11; I Corinthians 15:20-23).

Verse 5. Through Christ, Paul received “grace and apostleship,” which possibly means “the grace of apostleship.” Grace is the unmerited favor of God. God bestowed this grace upon Paul in order to produce obedience to the faith—“the obedience of faith” (16:26, *KJV*) or “the obedience that comes from faith” (*NIV*).

Faith here does not mean doctrine but belief itself. From the outset, the Book of Romans makes clear that genuine faith will always produce, and cannot be separated from, obedience. Justification by faith is inseparably