

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

authorship must deny themselves the easy cure of inadequate knowledge. There was abundant opportunity for Luke to acquire exact information, if on any point he lacked it, for intercommunication was the life of the early Church, and numerous witnesses were living. Dr. McGiffert has destroyed that error, if an error can be destroyed.

W. M. RAMSAY.

DIFFICULT PASSAGES IN ROMANS.

I. THE SON OF DAVID AND OF GOD.

IN this series, I shall discuss the meaning and teaching of the most difficult and important passages in the Epistle to the Romans. And, in order that we may see them *in situ*, in their relation to their context, I shall also give a short running outline of the argument of the Epistle.

Not having been at Rome, Paul begins his letter by introducing himself to his readers; and then sends to them a distinctively Christian greeting. He is *Paul*, a *servant of Jesus Christ*. The word *δοῦλος*, here used, is the ordinary term for a slave. That it conveys the idea of bondage, we learn from its contrast with the adjective *free* in 1 Cor. vii. 22, xii. 13, Gal. iii. 28, Eph. vi. 8, Col. iii. 11, and again in Rev. vi. 15, xiii. 16, xix. 18. For a hired servant, we have the term *μισθωτός*, as in Mark i. 20, John x. 12, 13. The word here used is correlative to *κύριος*, as in Matthew x. 24, 25. The mutual relation is well described in Matthew viii. 9: "I say to my servant do this; and he does it."

Objectionable as the term *slave of Christ* at first sight seems to be, it represents not inaccurately our real relation to Him. For although He rewards everyone according to his works, we are not hired servants who can leave His service for that of another master. He made us, and we

are His. We are therefore bound to Him by ties we cannot cast aside. This bond we recognise and gladly accept, as for our highest good. Thus bondage to Christ becomes perfect freedom: for it gives us full scope for our highest development.

By calling himself a slave of Christ, St. Paul pays honour to the Carpenter of Nazareth as one whom the pupil of Gamaliel is not ashamed to call his master. And by describing Him as *Jesus Christ*, he recognises the Nazarene as the *Anointed One* for whom his nation had long been waiting. By calling himself a servant, he also claims his readers' attention as speaking to them on behalf of one greater than himself. And he indicates his attitude of mind while writing this letter. It is a part of his service of Christ.

The writer claims to be *an apostle*. So 2 Corinthians i. 1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus"; and still more emphatically in Gal. i. 1, "Paul, an apostle, not from men nor by agency of man, but by agency of Jesus Christ and of God the Father who raised Him from the dead." He thus puts himself in the first rank of the servants of Christ. So 1 Cor. xii. 28: "God put in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers." A similar enumeration in Ephesians iv. 11: "And He gave, on the one hand the apostles, on the other hand the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers." Whatever was the number of the apostles, or in whatever variety of compass the word was used, by claiming this title St. Paul puts himself on a level with those whom, as we read in Luke vi. 13, Christ "named apostles."

St. Paul was an apostle by a divine summons. Similarly, as we read in 1 Sam. iii. 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, God *called* Samuel: and by that call he became, as we read in verse 20, "a prophet for Jehovah." So, in Matthew iv. 21, x. 1 f., we read that Christ *called* James and John to be apostles. His

own call, while on the way to Damascus, St. Paul describes in his speech to Agrippa recorded in Acts xxvi. 14-18: "Saul, Saul . . . to this end I have appeared to thee, to appoint thee a minister and witness both of the things which thou hast seen and those in which I will appear to thee, taking thee out of the people and the Gentiles, to whom I now send thee (*ἀποστέλλω*), to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a lot among the sanctified, by faith in Me."

Since Paul was actually an apostle and became such by a divine summons, it seems to me needless to insert the words *to be* in italics. He was *a called apostle*. The adjective is put before the substantive in order to give emphasis to the divine call by which he became an apostle.

The words following describe Paul's work. He had no other. Even while working as a tentmaker, he did so simply and only as the best means of securing acceptance for the word he preached. He was *separated* from every other work or aim except to spread *the Gospel of God*.

God spoke *through the prophets*: *διὰ τῶν προφητῶν*. So Matthew i. 22, ii. 5, 15, 17, 23, iii. 3, iv. 14, viii. 17, xii. 17, xiii. 35, xxi. 4, xxiv. 15, xxvii. 9, Acts ii. 16, xxviii. 25. A fuller phrase is found in Luke i. 70, Acts iii. 18, 21: "through the mouth of the prophets." This phrase, a conspicuous feature of the First Gospel, represents the prophet as the mouthpiece through which God spoke: *τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου*.

Notice that the promise passed *through* the lips of the prophets. It abides and continues to speak *in Holy Writings*. The absence of the article before this last phrase leaves us to look at the writings qualitatively. God spoke through a definite class of men present to the writer's thought: His word finds permanent embodiment in certain sacred writings. The adjective *holy* puts the books among

the various sacred objects of the Old Covenant as standing in special relation to God.

In one sense, as we read in Gal. iii. 8, the Gospel was announced beforehand to Abraham: *προευγγέλισατο*. But here St. Paul contents himself with saying that it was *before-promised*. The prophets spoke of it as reserved for the future. As an example, I may quote Jeremiah xxxi. 31-33: "Behold, days are coming, saith Jehovah, and I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant . . . I will put My law within them and upon their heart I will write it, and I will be their God and they shall be My people."

St. Paul's reference, in the second verse of his epistle, to the ancient prophets and to the Holy Scriptures is characteristic. He always represents the Gospel as a consummation of revelations given under the earlier covenant, in complete harmony with, yet surpassing, them. And this illustrates a still broader principle. Every new work of God is in harmony with, and supplements, His previous works. He never makes an absolutely new beginning; nor does He begin with the highest, but always passes from lower to higher, each step preparing a way for a further step.

In this second verse of his epistle, as in his whole teaching, St. Paul claims respect for the Gospel as fore-announced by men to whom all Jews look up with reverence, and in books held to be sacred. It is therefore not new, but has been foreseen and prepared for during long centuries.

Verses 3 and 4 state the great matter of the Gospel: *concerning His Son*. The definite article makes *τοῦ Υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ* a distinguishing title of the Person referred to. He was known as the Son of God. This suggests irresistibly that His relation to God and His mode of derivation from God differ in kind from that by which men and angels sprang from their Creator's hands.

On this august title, the writer lingers with further exposition. *According to flesh*: looked at from the point of view of bodily form, the Son of God entered a new mode of existence through the gateway of David's descendants. With the words *γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυίδ* compare John i. 14, *σὰρξ ἐγένετο*. The verb *γίνομαι* without a secondary predicate denotes to enter into existence absolutely, as in John i. 3, *πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο*: with a secondary predicate, as here, it denotes entrance on a new state of being. Such, to Him, was the condition entered by the Son at His birth in Israel.

Parallel with *τοῦ γενομένου* is *τοῦ ὀρισθέντος*: *who was marked out as Son of God*. The word *ὀρίζω*, from which we have *horizon*, denotes to draw a *ὄρος* or boundary around an object, thus marking it off from others or defining it. The same word is used, also in reference to Christ, in Acts x. 42: "This is He that is *marked out* by God as judge of men living and dead." It is found again in Acts xvii. 31: "He will judge the world in righteousness in a man whom He has *marked out*: whereof He has given assurance to all men by raising Him from the dead." Christ had announced that He would return to judge the world. And He claimed, at least by sure inference, to be the Son of God. By raising Him from the dead, God confirmed this announcement and this claim. He thus drew a line around Jesus of Nazareth, marking Him off from all others as the designated Judge of the world, and as, in a unique sense, Son of God. This attestation came from His empty grave: *ὀρισθέντος . . . ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν*.

The plural form *νεκρῶν* is puzzling. For the resurrection referred to was of one man only. A parallel may be found in Matthew ii. 20: "they are dead who sought the child's life." For these words were spoken on the death of Herod, the only person of whom we read as desiring to kill the infant Jesus. In each case the plural calls attention not to

one case, but to the class to which it belongs. No one lives whom Joseph need fear. By victory over death the son of David was marked out as Son of God.

This marking out took place amid a manifestation of Divine power : *ἐν δυνάμει*. Hence came its validity as proof that Christ is Son of God. The greatness of the power revealed the Hand of God ; and thus gave His sanction to the claims of Christ. Similarly the mission of an ambassador is sometimes supported by an exhibition of the naval or military power of the monarch who sends him. To the power of God manifested in the resurrection of Christ, great prominence is given in Ephesians i. 19 f. : “ according to the energy of the might of His strength, which energy He put forth in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.” This passage is an example of what we frequently find in the epistles of Paul, a thought existing in germ in the second group and receiving fuller development in the third. This is, however, no argument for the later date of the third group. For it is much more likely that this real and valuable development took place in the mind of Paul than in some writer of the second century. Of such valuable development of Christian doctrine, we have no trace in sub-apostolic times. Another reference to the power of God is found in 2 Corinthians xiii. 4 : “ He was crucified from weakness ; nevertheless He lives from the power of God.” We have here, as in Romans i. 4, effects proceeding from causes.

The absence of the article before *Son of God* in verse 4, in contrast to its presence before *His Son* in verse 3, calls attention, not to the definite person bearing this title, but to the dignity involved in the title itself. The term is here used qualitatively, as are the terms *Gospel of God* and *Holy Writings* in verses 1 and 2.

The different descriptions of Christ given in verses 3 and 4 are said to correspond with the different points of view

from which He may be regarded. *According to flesh, i.e.* from the point of view of His material form, He sprang from David's descendants. *According to spirit, i.e.* from the point of view of the unseen and animating principle within that bodily form, He was marked out as Son of God.

The contrast of *flesh* and *spirit* is as wide, not only as human life, but as life itself except perhaps in its lowest forms. Everywhere we have the outward, visible, material, organic form, animated and moved by the inward and unseen and immaterial spirit.

The *flesh* is related to the *body* as the cloth to the coat. The latter is the individual organism, consisting of various members, each with its own function. The former is the material common to many organisms, and having qualities peculiar to itself. The material has varieties. "There is one flesh of men, another flesh of cattle, another of birds, and another of fishes" (1 Cor. xv. 39). But all these varieties are related, by many common qualities and functions, as *flesh*.

The contrast of *flesh* and *spirit* meets us again in Romans viii. 4, 5, 6, 9, 13. It there denotes two influences, each claiming to direct man's steps. But even here the original meaning of the word *flesh* must not be lost sight of. That a word denoting primarily the material of man's body is used to describe an immoral influence, implies that the body exerts in some cases such influence. And this is implied in ch. vi. 12, "Let not sin reign as king in your mortal body in order to obey its desires. The body has, in virtue of its constitution, certain desires and dislikes which tend to rule the whole of human life. These tendencies, yielded to, always lead to sin. This does not imply that the material of our bodies is essentially bad; but that sin, always a disintegrating power, entrenches itself in the lower side of our nature, and from this vantage ground seeks to dominate the whole man. But manifestly this

conflict had no place in the God-Man. The moral contrast and antagonism of *flesh* and *spirit* so conspicuous in Romans viii. 4-13, Galatians v. 16-vi. 8, is essentially different from the contrast before us.

This moral use, however, of the word *flesh* reminds us that it suggests thoughts other than mere bodily form. At this we need not wonder. For life is never found except robed in a definite and peculiar bodily form. Consequently the word used to denote this bodily form connotes life, and especially human life, in all its manifestations. So Romans iii. 20, "by works of law shall no *flesh* be justified." Here the word *flesh* includes the whole man. Except in the case of the dead, which is an abnormal condition of flesh, we cannot think of the bodily form without some thought of its animating life. But in so thinking, we must always keep in view the bodily form which suggested the use of the word *flesh*. And we have no right to enlarge the connotation of the word except so far as is suggested by the context. In the passage before us, this primary meaning gives good and sufficient sense. Touching His bodily form, Christ sprang from David's seed. At the same time, we need not doubt that, along with bodily form and from the same source, He received much more than His material clothing. But how much He received this passage does not say. Nor have we any indication that inherited faculties were in the writer's thought.

We come now to the second and nobler side of the contrast: *according to spirit*. In the contrast, noted above, in chapter viii. 4-13, the word *spirit* is expounded by St. Paul himself to denote the Spirit of God, of Christ, of Him that raised Christ. In verse 10, the indwelling of the Spirit of God and of Christ is described as the inward presence of Christ Himself. This spirit can be no other than the Personal and Holy Spirit of God, the Third of the Divine Three. As the source of an influence moving man and

guiding His steps from within, He stands in conspicuous contrast to the flesh, the bodily nature common to all men in which, in the unsaved, sin dwells and reigns.

By Chrysostom and other ancient expositors, the term *spirit of holiness*, here contrasted with *flesh*, was interpreted in this common use of the word *spirit*. But the Spirit of God stands in no special contrast to the bodily form of Christ. The natural contrast is that of the inward spirit which animated and moved that sacred body, spoke through those lips, and through the face of Jesus smiled on men. And this gives good sense. Looked at from the point of view of His body, He was David's son: looked at from the point of view of the spirit which moved that bodily form, He was marked off from all others as, in a unique sense, Son of God.

In this *spirit* of Christ, we can distinguish two elements. The voice which spoke through those human lips claimed to be that of the own and only-begotten Son of God, compared with whom the greatest of men were but servants. So Romans viii. 32, John iii. 16, 18, Hebrews iii. 5, 6. This implies that in His relation to God and mode of derivation from God He differs in kind from all others. Abundant other teaching in the New Testament makes Him a sharer of the infinity and the eternity of God. This places Him above the infinite distance which separates the Creator from the created. This divine element in the Incarnate Son is indisputably spirit. For God is Spirit. And it is the divine source of all the human activity of Christ. Looked at from the point of view of this divine element, the son of David is also Son of God.

But in Him there is another element. For here and there in the New Testament we find indications of limited and therefore created intelligence. In Luke ii. 52 we see a boy of twelve increasing in wisdom as in stature. And even at the close of His earthly course we find that the

Son does not know the day of His return : Mark xiii. 32. To this human element are most easily attributed the emotions of trouble and sorrow described in John xi. 33, "troubled in spirit," and in chapter xii. 27, "now is My soul troubled." In other words, in Christ we see a created human spirit mysteriously informed and permeated by the divine personality of the Eternal Son.

This created and pure human spirit must have been a new creation of God. For it did not inherit the stain and moral bondage resulting from Adam's sin. Just as Adam, when first created, was a created outflow of the uncreated personality of God, so, but in far higher degree, was the created human intelligence of the God-Man an outflow and human counterpart of the infinite intelligence of the Eternal Son.

In the Incarnate Son we can detect yet another element, a purely animal yet immaterial nature, in closest relation to the flesh, the seat of bodily appetites such as hunger and thirst. If this were present to the writer's thought, it would be included under the term *flesh*, and doubtless it was derived from David's seed.

With this conception of the Incarnate Son, as present in the Apostle's thought, we return to the verses before us. Looking at Him from the point of view of outward bodily form, He came from the family of David. Looking at the invisible and immaterial spirit which moved His human form, He was marked out from all others, by resurrection from the dead, as Son of God. In this inner side of the son of David were, as we have just seen, two elements, a divine personality and a created human spirit. In reference to each of these Christ was Son of God. And it is not easy to say which was chiefly in St. Paul's thought. And the distinction is immaterial. For the human spirit was a perfect created counterpart of the divine nature of Christ. What He was touching the one, He was also

touching the other. But as the human spirit of Christ came into immediate contact with the body born at Bethlehem, and is the simplest contrast to it, perhaps this was the writer's chief reference. With this corresponds the use of the word *spirit* in Romans i. 9, viii. 10, 1 Corinthians v. 3, 4, and especially verse 5, "destruction of the *flesh* in order that the *spirit* may be saved," and elsewhere.

The added word of *holiness* characterises the *spirit* of the Son as holy, *i.e.* as standing in definite relation to God, and as absolutely devoted to Him. This devotion finds expression in John iv. 34, "My food is that I may do the will of Him that sent Me and complete His work"; and in chapter vii. 38, "I am come down from heaven not in order that I may do My own will but the will of Him that sent Me." Both the divine personality and the human spirit of the eternal Son turned ever towards the Father, His one purpose being to accomplish the Father's purposes. In Him therefore was realised in human form the consecration dimly outlined in the ancient ritual.

The above exposition illustrates the bearing of Systematic Theology on exegesis. This last has often been warped by dogmatic prejudice. Against this we must be ever on our guard. But a man's words, written or spoken, can be understood only in the light of his thought as a whole, of which the thought he wishes to convey is a part. Indeed the same words from different lips and to different ears convey often different ideas. To understand correctly the words of an ancient writer, we must reproduce the mental environment from which they sprang. This is specially the case when he deals with a matter which, like theology, has a phraseology of its own. Without some comprehension of Paul's thought and modes of thought there can be no reliable interpretation of his words.

After expounding the double nature of the Incarnate

Son, St. Paul goes on to describe his own relation to Christ, and through Him to his readers. This relation is shared by others: *we received*. Whether the plural *we* was designed to include Barnabas, who along with Paul, as we read in Acts xiii. 2, was specially called to work among the Gentiles, or refers to the world-wide commission given, as recorded in Acts i. 8, to the whole apostolic band, the words before us do not determine. But the reference to Barnabas is very unlikely. The words simply assert that others besides Paul had received the *apostleship*.

The preposition *διά* with genitive is constantly used, as here, to describe the relation of the Son of God both to creation and to redemption. It belongs distinctively to the Second Person of the Trinity. So 1 Corinthians viii. 6, "one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom* are all things, and we through Him"; similarly Colossians i. 16, "through Him and for Him were all things created"; and verse 20, "through Him to reconcile all things to Himself." Important coincidences are found in Hebrews i. 2, "through whom He made the ages"; and in John i. 3, 10, "all things were made through Him . . . the world was made through Him." The eternal Son is the instrument or Agent of all that God does, the channel *through* which His purposes pass into actuality.

Through Christ the smile and favour of God fell upon Paul: and through His agency he received his mission as an apostle. There is no greater mark of the favour of God than appointment to evangelical work. The aim of this apostolic mission (same words again in chapter xvi. 26) is to lead men *to obedience*. The genitive following may be expounded either obedience to faith, or obedience characterised by faith. The practical difference is slight. But, inasmuch as we find in 2 Corinthians x. 5 "obedience of Christ," and in 1 Peter i. 22 "obedience of the truth," in each case noting the object obeyed, and in Acts vi. 7

“obeyed the faith,” it is better to give this interpretation to the words before us. Faith in Christ involves always submission to His authority. The words *among all the Gentiles* mark out the vast sphere of apostolic work allotted to Paul; in complete harmony with Galatians ii. 9, “that we should go to the Gentiles.” But Paul’s separation from Barnabas makes very unlikely a special reference to him here. Doubtless Paul was thinking chiefly of himself. The words following, *on behalf of His name*, describe the aim of this mission among the Gentiles, viz., to proclaim the name of Christ, this implying His claim to be the Son of God.

This scope of apostleship includes, not only other Gentiles, but also Paul’s readers: *among whom are also ye*. The readers addressed are further characterized as *called ones of Jesus Christ*. Just as on the way to Damascus Paul received a divine summons which made him an apostle, so in the Gospel his readers received a summons which gave them to Christ. By that call, they became His. So, writing to some of his converts, he says in 2 Thessalonians ii. 14, “who called you, through our Gospel, to obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The readers addressed are further described in the words following, *to all the beloved ones of God who are at Rome*; and still further as *called saints*. This last phrase is parallel to that in which, in verse 1, the writer asserts his apostleship. The reason for the translation here given is the same in both cases. He was an apostle and they were saints, in each case by a divine summons. So in Romans viii. 27, xii. 13, xv. 25, 26, 31, xvi. 2, 15, and elsewhere frequently the members of Christian Churches are called *saints*.

The word *saints* recalls the holy objects of the Old Covenant, and especially the sacred persons. So Psalm cvi. 16: “Aaron the saint of Jehovah.” Aaron and his sons were holy in the sense that God had claimed them

to be His own, claimed for His service their powers and their lives. This claim was independent of their personal character. Even the deep sin of Hophni and Phineas did not obliterate the fact that God had claimed them to do His holy work. Their high office made their immorality to be sacrilege. So does God claim for Himself all whom in Christ He saves. Just so, as we read in Exodus xiii. 1, He claimed the firstborn whom He had rescued from death by the blood of the Paschal Lamb. This is the objective holiness of the people of God. In other words, the phrase *called saints* does but express, in language borrowed from the ancient ritual, the truth already expressed in the phrase *called ones of Jesus Christ*. Thus Paul, who began his greeting by claiming a position which the call of Christ gave to him, closes it by recognising a position which an equally real divine summons had given to his readers.

Thus has St. Paul spanned the gulf between the Jew of Tarsus and the Gentile Christians at Rome. The key-stone of the connecting bridge is the son of David, who is also Son of God, of whom both he and they are servants, made such by divine summons. He wishes for them *grace*, the smile and favour of God through which he has himself received apostleship; and *peace*, the inward rest evoked by this smile of God. May all this come to them from the common *Father* and the common *Lord*.

Notice the high honour paid to Christ by the close collocation of His name, under one preposition, with the name of God: *from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*. So 1 Corinthians i. 3, 2 Corinthians i. 2, and usually in the epistles of Paul. In contrast to this association of the Father and the Son, the risen Lord is careful, as recorded in John xx. 17, to distinguish His relation to God from that of His disciples: "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God." In the words before us Paul does not hesitate to link together in closest association the

names of Christ and of God as the one source of blessing. But, that the Father is spoken of simply as *God* and Jesus Christ only as *Lord*, suggests that it was not then usual to speak of Christ as God. This title was a correct theological inference of a somewhat later day. Points of transition to this later theological position are found in John xx. 28, "my Lord and my God," and in chapter i. 1, "the Word was God."

In the apostolic greeting which in this paper I have endeavoured to expound, we have found a conspicuous feature of the Epistle to the Romans, viz., the profound homage with which its gifted author bows in the presence of one who in his own day had been put to death in the city in which he was educated and afterwards lived. This homage of one man for another is unique in literature. This may be illustrated by the words with which Plato, at the close of the *Phædo*, describes Socrates: "Such was the end of our friend, whom I may truly call the wisest and justest and best of all the men whom I have known." This lowly homage to a fellow-countryman of his own day can be accounted for only as in this greeting Paul accounts for it: "marked out as Son of God by resurrection of the dead." And that the persecutor was led to believe that the object of his persecution had triumphed over death, and the immense effect of this belief on his subsequent thought and life and on the world, can be accounted for only by the historic reality of the resurrection of Christ and by the eternal reality of the unique relation to God which St. Paul claimed on His behalf.

In my next paper, I hope to discuss St. Paul's theory of Ethics.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.