

THE PRESENT TRUTH

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The Salutation Romans 1:1-7: 1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God 2 (which he had promised afore, by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures), 3 concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made 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 by whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name; 6 among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: 7 to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Bond Servant: "Paul, a servant of Jesus." It is thus that the apostle introduces himself to the Romans. In several other epistles the same expression is used. Some people would be ashamed to acknowledge themselves servants; the apostles were not. It makes a vast difference whom one serves. The servant derives his importance from the dignity of the one served. Paul served the Lord Jesus Christ. Everybody may serve the same Master. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" Rom. 6:16. Even the ordinary house servant who yields to the Lord is the servant of the Lord, and not of man. "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Jesus Christ." Col. 3:22-24. Such a consideration as this can not fail to glorify the most menial drudgery. Our version does not give us the full force of the term which the apostle uses when he calls himself a servant. It is really "bond servant." He used the ordinary Greek word for slave. If we are really the Lord's servants, we are servants bound to him for life. It is a bondage that is itself freedom, "for he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman; likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." 1 Cor. 7:22.

Separated: The apostle Paul was "separated unto the gospel." So is every one who is really the servant of the Lord. "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye can not serve God and mammon." Matt. 6:24. No man can serve the Lord and have other service besides that. "Do you mean to say that a merchant or other business man can not be a Christian?" By no means. What I said was that a man can not serve the Lord and at the same time have other service. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Col. 3:17. If the man is not serving the Lord in his business, then he is not serving the Lord at all. The true servant of Christ is truly separated. But this does not mean that he separates himself from personal contact with the world. The Bible gives no countenance to monkery. The most hopeless sinner is he who thinks himself too good to associate with sinners. How then are we to be separated unto the gospel? By the presence of God in the heart. Moses said to the Lord: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up thence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth." Ex. 33:15,16. But the one who is separated to the public ministry of the gospel as the apostle Paul was, is separated in a special sense in that he may not engage in any other business for personal gain. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." 2 Tim. 2:4. He can not take any position, however high under earthly governments. To do so is to dishonor his Master, and to belittle his service. The minister of the gospel is the ambassador of Christ, and there is no other position that can approach it in honor.

The Gospel of God: The apostle declared that he was "separated unto the gospel of God." It is the gospel of God "concerning his Son Jesus Christ." Christ is God and therefore the gospel of God, of which the apostle speaks in the first verse of the chapter, is identical with "the gospel of Christ" of which he speaks in the sixteenth verse. Too many people separate the Father and the Son in the work of the gospel. Many do so unconsciously. God, the Father, as well as the Son, is our Saviour. "God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten son." John 3:16. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." 2 Cor. 5:19. "The council of peace" is "between them both." Zech. 6:13. Christ came to the earth only as the representative of the Father. Whoever saw Christ, saw the Father also. John 14:9. The works which Christ did, were the works of the Father, who dwelt in him. Vs. 10.

Even the words which he spoke, were the words of the Father. Vs. 24. When we hear Christ saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," we are listening to the gracious invitation of God the Father. When we see Christ taking the little children up in his arms, and blessing them, we are witnessing the tenderness of the Father. When we see Christ receiving sinners, mingling with them, and eating with them, forgiving their sins, and cleansing the hideous lepers with a touch, we are looking upon the condescension and compassion of the Father. Even when we see our Lord upon the cross, with the blood streaming from his side, that blood by which we are reconciled to God, we must not forget that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," so that the apostle Paul said, "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Acts 20:28.

The Gospel in the Old Testament: The gospel of God to which the apostle Paul declared himself to be separated, was the gospel "which he had promised afore by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2); literally, the gospel which he had before announced or preached. This shows us that the Old Testament contains the gospel, and also that the gospel in the Old Testament is the same gospel that is in the New. It is the only gospel that the apostle preached. That being the case, it should not be thought strange for people to believe the Old Testament, and to refer to it as of equal authority with the New Testament.

We read that God "preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." Gal. 3:8. The gospel preached to the people when Paul lived was the same gospel that was preached unto the ancient Israelites. See Hebrews 4:2. Moses wrote of Christ, and so much of the gospel is to be found in his writings that a man who does not believe what Moses wrote, can not believe in Christ. John 5:46, 47. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Acts 10:43.

Paul had only the Old Testament when he went to Thessalonica, "and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead." Acts 17:2, 3. Timothy had nothing in his childhood and youth but the Old Testament writings, and the apostle wrote to him: "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Tim. 3:14, 15. Then go to the Old Testament with the expectation of finding Christ and his righteousness there, and you will be made wiser unto salvation. Do not discriminate between Moses and Paul, between David and Peter, between Jeremiah and James, between Isaiah and John.

The Seed of David: The gospel of God is "concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." Rom. 1:3. Read the history of David, and of the kings who descended from him, and who became the ancestors of Jesus, and you will see that on the human side the Lord was handicapped by his ancestry as badly as anybody can ever be. Many of them were licentious and cruel idolaters. Although Jesus was thus compassed with infirmity, he "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." 1 Pet. 2:22. This is to give courage to men in the lowest condition of life. It is to show that the power of the gospel of the grace of God can triumph over heredity. The fact that Jesus was made of the seed of David means that he is heir to the throne of David. Of David's throne the Lord said, "Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee; thy throne shall be established forever." 2 Sam. 7:16. David's kingdom is therefore coextensive with the inheritance promised to Abraham, which is the whole world. See Romans 4:13.

The angel said of Jesus, "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Luke 1:32, 33. But all this involved his bearing the curse of the inheritance, and suffering death. "For the joy that was set before him" He "endured the cross, despising the shame." Heb. 12:2. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." Phil. 2:9. As with Christ, so with us; it is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom. He who fears reproach, or who makes his lowly birth, or his inherited traits, an excuse for his shortcomings, will fail of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Christ went to the lowest depths of humiliation in order that all who are in those depths might, if they would, ascend with him to the utmost heights of exaltation.

Power by the Resurrection: Although Jesus Christ was of lowly birth, he was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Rom. 1:4. Was he not the Son of God before the resurrection? and was he not so declared to be? Certainly; and the power of the resurrection was manifested in all his life. To speak of nothing else, the power of the resurrection was shown in his raising the dead, which he did by the power dwelling in him. But it was the resurrection from the dead that settled the matter beyond all doubt for men.

After his resurrection he met the disciples, and said unto them, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Matt. 28:18. The death of Christ shattered all the hopes that they had centered in him; but when he "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days" (Acts 1:3), they had ample proof of his power.

Their sole work thenceforth was to be witnesses of his resurrection and of its power. The power of the resurrection is according to the Spirit of holiness, for it was by the Spirit that he was raised. The power given to make men holy is the power that raised Jesus from the dead. "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness."

The Obedience of Faith: Paul said that through Christ he had received grace and apostleship for the obedience of faith among all nations. True faith is obedience. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom He hath sent." John 6:29. Christ said, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Luke 6:46. That is, a profession of faith in Christ which is not accompanied by obedience, is worthless. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead." James 2:17. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Vs. 26.

A man does not breathe in order to show that he lives, but because he is alive. He lives by breathing. His breath is his life. So a man can not do good works in order to demonstrate that he has faith, but he does good works because the works are the necessary result of faith. Even Abraham was justified by works, because "faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness."

Beloved of God: That was a most comforting assurance that was given "to all that are in Rome." How many people have wished that they could hear an angel direct from glory say to them what Gabriel said to Daniel, "Thou art greatly beloved"! The apostle Paul wrote by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and so the message of love came as directly from heaven to the Romans as it did to Daniel. The Lord did not single out a few favorites by name, but declared that all in Rome were beloved of God.

Well, there is no respect of persons with God, and that message of love to the Romans is ours as well. They were "beloved of God" simply because "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Jer. 31:3. And this everlasting love to men is not shaken, although they forget it; for to those who have turned away, and fallen by their iniquity, he says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." Hosea 14:43. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He can not deny Himself."

Called Saints: The reader will notice that the words "to be" in Romans 1:7 are indicated as supplied, so that instead of "called to be saints," we may read literally, "called saints." God calls all men to be saints, but all those who accept him he calls saints. That is their title. When God calls people saints, they are saints.

These words were addressed to the church in Rome, and not to the Church of Rome. The Church of Rome has always been apostate and pagan. It has abused the word "saint" until in its calendar it is almost a term of reproach. No greater sin has ever been committed by Rome than the distinction it has made between "saints" and ordinary Christians, making practically two standards of goodness. It has led people to think that laboring men and housewives were not and could not be saints, and has thus discounted true, everyday piety, and has put a premium on pious laziness and self-righteous deeds.

But God has not two standards of piety, and all the faithful people in Rome, poor and unknown as many of them were, he called saints. It is the same to-day with God, although men may reckon differently. The first seven verses of the first chapter of Romans are the salutation. No uninspired letter ever embraced so much in its greeting as this one. The apostle was so overflowing with the love of God that he could not write a letter without covering almost the whole gospel in the salutation. The next eight verses may well be summarized in the words "debtor to all," for they show the completeness of the apostle's devotedness to others. Let us read them carefully, and not be content with one reading: