

## 2. THE GREAT DEBATE (Romans 1:1-7)

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**PAUL**, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God, which He promised before through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead ... (Romans 1:1-4 NKJV).

We have compared the pair, Paul & Jesus, as introduced in **Romans 1:1-7**. We have seen that the same credentials apply to both men. Both Paul and Jesus are servants of the Gospel of God, both have been chosen to be apostles, and both were separated for their respective ministries from the time they were born.

We mentioned that this congruence between the two men does not detract in any way from the preeminence which Christ has over Paul (after all, Paul is **a servant of Jesus Christ** who is the founder and head of the Church **v.1**). In Roman society, as in ours, a man is a man whatever station he holds in life — whether he is a peasant-slave or a king. So it's not a question of "nature" but of status and rank.

We come now to the long debate as to how, and in what sense, Jesus the Messiah holds his supreme position over Paul and all mankind. Is it because he is both divine and human as to his reputed "two natures" — or is it for some other reason(s)?

### ACCORDING TO THE FLESH = THE ROYAL CONNECTION

For Paul, it was "orthodox" Christian belief to say that Jesus the Messiah had arrived on the stage of the world's redemptive history exactly as God had **promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord ... who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh ...**(v. 3).

Jesus was the direct physical descendant of King David's royal line. The prophets were clear about this essential qualification: Messiah must arise from the legitimate family tree of David's dynasty otherwise God's promise would fail. *Messiah must originate from the biological "seed" (Lit. "sperm") from David's 'loins'.* ( <sup>1</sup> )

Elsewhere Paul states that the Gospel of God is not authentic if we do not **remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel (2 Tim 2:8)**. Any other messianic claimant is a pretender, and not the Saviour whom God had **promised beforehand through His prophets**.

<sup>1</sup> ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα where the Greek word *spermatos* speaks of the male sperm or seed (2 Sam.7).

The long-promised Messianic King must arise from the tribe of Judah, and specifically from David's bloodline. ( <sup>2</sup> ) ( <sup>3</sup> )

This ... connects Paul's experience as a Christian with his history as a Jew. It establishes that Jesus Christ is not an afterthought of God, a scissors-and-paste remedy when the human experiment failed. Rather, Jesus Christ had long been foreseen in Israel, and apart from him all that had gone before was incomplete. Jesus Christ was the goal in a long history of salvation, the anchor runner, so to speak, in the divine relay from Abraham to the day of salvation ... in Paul's own time, God spoke his last word. The awesome finality that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose stamped Paul's consciousness with an indelible sense of duty and obligation. Paul is a **servant, called, apostle, and set apart**. ( <sup>4</sup> )

## GOD'S SON HAD A BEGINNING!

It is right here that we must not miss a most vital piece of information concerning Jesus' qualifications **according to the flesh**. Most English translations say that Jesus **was born of the seed of David**, but Paul literally says that Jesus "**came into existence** (**γενόμενου** from **γίνομαι / ginomai**) **from the seed of David**". The primary definition of **ginomai** is to begin to be, to come into existence, to receive being. Its secondary sense is to arise in time, to appear in history.

Let's not beat around the bush here: The Son of God did not exist before that special moment in time when God's Spirit generated Jesus by direct miraculous creation in the virgin Mary. We have previously seen that the promised Servant-saviour was the one who would testify, **The LORD called me from the womb; from the matrix of my mother ... the LORD ... formed me from the womb to be His servant ... (Is. 49: 1, 5)**. Any other message which preaches a Son of God who was not procreated — did not begin to exist by the LORD'S agency in his mother in real history — is not preaching the Jesus of the Bible! ( <sup>5</sup> ) ( <sup>6</sup> )

As **Sir Anthony Buzzard** succinctly puts it ... in this summary statement, (**Romans 1: 2-4**) which is decisive for Paul's understanding of Jesus, the Son of God begins as the descendant of David (exactly as Matt. 1 and Luke 1 say) ... Many readers overlook that it is in Paul's words here **God's Son** (v.3) whose origin is from the line

<sup>2</sup> See other proofs for this necessity e.g. in **Acts 13:23; Heb 7:14; Rev 5:5; 22:16**.

<sup>3</sup> In other articles I deal with the challenges of those who say that this means **Joseph** had to have been the physical father of Jesus. See the first 5 articles under the subheading **Defending the Faith ... Apologetics** in the ARTICLES Tab at [www.thebiblejesus.com/articles](http://www.thebiblejesus.com/articles).

<sup>4</sup> **Edwards, James R., Romans: Understanding the Bible Commentary Series**, Baker Books, 1992, pp28-29 (Bold Type original).

<sup>5</sup> Cf **1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7**

<sup>6</sup> For those who object to the doctrine of the Virginal conception of the Son of God, and particularly for those who say that Mary could not pass on her tribal inheritance from David who belonged to **the Tribe of Judah**, see the first five articles under the heading **Defending the Faith ... Apologetics** in the **ARTICLES** tab..

of David. God became the Father of that Son by miracle in Mary ... Paul knows of no eternal Son. ( <sup>7</sup> ) **Jesus' conception in Mary was the genesis of God's Son!**

Although it is hidden in most of our English translations, the very first verse in the NT starts with the **genesis** of Jesus the Messiah: **The book of the genesis (γένεσις / genesis) of Jesus Christ, the son of David ... (Matt 1:1)**! Most translations read, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ ..." which, although true as already indicated, obscures the powerful affirmation about *the origin* of Jesus as God's Son. ( <sup>8</sup> )

This is an uncomfortable truth which most translators avoid. For example, we observed in the first article the way the NIV 'translates' the phrase **according to the flesh** as ... **who, as to his human nature, was a descendant of David ...**

Who would have thought that any member of the human species would not have a human nature anyway? But, **in context**, **according to the flesh** is **not** talking about Jesus' human nature, **it's talking about his royal credentials, his kingly pedigree, his regal family tree, and thus, his fitness to qualify as the promised son of David**. That's the context — *not* whether Jesus is a human being! Every descendant of David must be a human being, thus making the NIV redundant here.

However, by its subtle intrusion, the NIV prepares the way for the "two natures" of Christ. They want us to believe that Jesus the Messiah, **as to his human nature**, sprang from David, but that his "essential" identity is that of the "eternal Son". But let's press on.

## **CHRIST DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD WITH POWER**

So, what does the next expression, **and declared (Lit. separated) to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead**, mean? Most capitalise the word **Spirit** which leads the reader in a certain direction. According to our trinitarian friends, this must mean the Third Member of the 'Godhead', i.e., "God the Holy Spirit" brought Jesus up from the grave.

It is absolutely true that Paul will later write in this epistle that the **Spirit of Him Who raised Messiah Jesus from the dead ... will also give life to your mortal bodies (Rom 8:10-11)**. This is referring to the power of the Spirit of God the Father. Jesus of Nazareth would have rotted in the tomb like every other human being were it not for the faithfulness of God the Father, whom Jesus identified as **the Father Who is Spirit (John 4: 23-24)**. ( <sup>9</sup> ) But is this Paul's intention here in his introduction to Romans? I think there is more to it ...

<sup>7</sup> The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation: New Testament with Commentary. Restoration Fellowship, Footnote p273 (Boldface original).

<sup>8</sup> Cf Lk 1:14 where **many will rejoice at John's genesis** (though again your Bible probably reads **birth**)!

<sup>9</sup> The apostle Peter states this truth as a fulfilment of Ps 16:10 in Acts 2:24-28.

Since we are comparing and contrasting Paul & Jesus, let us not fail to notice that Paul goes on in **verse 9** to say that, “ **The God whom I serve with my spirit is my Witness ...**” Nobody for a single moment believes that the man Paul has two natures just because he served God in his spirit (small ‘s’)!

It's no different for Jesus! There are many verses which speak of the spirit of Jesus where there can be no doubt his human spirit is being referenced. Here are a few: **The child (Jesus) grew and became strong in spirit ... (Lk.1:80; 2:40). Jesus perceived in his spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves (Mk 2:8). Jesus groaned in the spirit and was troubled .... (John 11:33). Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified saying .... (John 13:21). Jesus said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit’ ... (Lk 23:46).**

As a true man, like the apostle Paul, our Lord Jesus had a human spirit. But our translators think they have hit pay-dirt for Jesus’ eternal Deity when Paul writes that he was **declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead ... (v.4).** (Notice the capital ‘S’!)

The usual trinitarian explanation is summarised by **The Expositor's Bible Commentary** ... **If one takes this statement as a flesh-spirit antithesis, this would be a reference to the twofold nature of Jesus Christ: as to his humanity a descendant of David; as to the holiness of his spirit, his Deity, the Son of God ... these two phrases are to be understood as sequential. That is, in the humility of the incarnation Jesus was born a descendant of David, but now “through his resurrection from the dead” he has been appointed Son of God in power by means of the Spirit. ( <sup>10</sup> )**

Did you see the big pre-supposition? ***If we take this statement as a flesh-spirit antithesis, it would be a reference to the twofold nature of Jesus Christ: as to his humanity, a descendant of David; as to the holiness of his spirit, his Deity, the Son of God ... !?!***

Notice how our commentator rightly, I believe, states that these two phrases **are to be understood as sequential**, with the fulcrum being the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death. But which two phases is the apostle Paul referring to? To a putative **incarnation** (i.e. transmutation) of an “eternal Son” who pre-existed in the holiness of his Deity before he “took on flesh as man”? Or, to a uniquely created human Jesus whose existence began at conception and that did not end at death because God raised him again?

Why not take the two phases to be Jesus’ *human* life? One phase before his resurrection and the next stage to his post-resurrection exaltation to God’s right hand? Before the resurrection the man Jesus had been the Son of God in suffering. After the resurrection the same Son of God was installed as Lord Messiah seated at

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<sup>10</sup> Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (General Editors). Zondervan, Romans-Galatians, Vol. 11, p36.

his Father's right hand (with the promise of his return to earth to reign over the Kingdom of God) **with power**.

## **“ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS”**

Let's see how reasonable this interpretation is. The careful reader will observe (though again it's more obvious in the Greek text) that Paul does not use the phrase “the Holy Spirit” here. He writes of **the Spirit [spirit] of holiness**. There are only three times in the NT where Paul uses this special word “holiness” (ἁγιωσύνη / *hagiōsynē*). Here in **Romans 1:4**, in **2 Cor 7:1** and in **1 Thess 3:13**. In each of the other two places, the context clearly refers to moral purity; Believers are to **cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God** and we are to **establish our hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father ...**

Observe how this particular word **holiness** speaks of the moral purity of our own hearts before God. Carefully note how this moral purity is to be in our own **flesh and spirit**, which covers the entirety of our humanity — **flesh and spirit**.

**Romans 1: 4** is presenting to us **the gospel concerning God's Son**, who was a human being descended from his ancestor David, and who all his life was morally pure and holy before God in his own **heart**, which is to say, in the perfect humanity of his own **flesh and spirit**!

Paul says this is why God the Father justified Jesus the Messiah. He did this by vindicating Jesus our Lord by raising him up from death (God cannot die!) and declaring him alive before a world which wickedly rejected and condemned him!

God raised the man Jesus to be the first immortalised human being because he presented his entire life to his Father as the sinless, spotless, morally pure Lamb, entirely free from any filth, defilement, or imperfection in his **body and spirit**!

God raised Jesus because he himself possessed **a spirit of holiness** (N.B. there is no definite article before “spirit”, which is always significant in the Greek text, and another reason why **Romans 1:4** is not a reference to the Holy Spirit of God — but is a reference to Jesus' own human spirit!).

## **THE RESURRECTED LORD JESUS STILL LIVES BY HIS FATHER'S POWER!**

Furthermore, when interpreting the statement that Jesus was **declared to be the Son of God with power, according to a spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead**, we must take full account of Paul's key phrase **with power**.

Of course Jesus was the Son of God by God's power right from his miraculous conception. That's what the angel **Gabriel** told Mary ... **holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; for this precise reason**



the offspring to be begotten in you will be holy and will be called the Son of God (Lk 1:35). Jesus' initial procreation by the agency of God's holy Spirit in Mary was already attributed to the power of the Most High from day one of his conception!

Nevertheless, during his earthly ministry the Son of God was subject to the frailty and limitations every human being experiences, but since his resurrection he has entered into a new phase of his human existence (as believers also will at his Second Coming!) — that of immortality **with power**.

Jesus has gone before us. He is **the firstfruits** of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:23). He is now **declared with power** to be the Son of God with universal lordship. David's physical descendant is God's **designated** man awaiting the day when Yahweh God will send him back to earth to reign as King on David's throne from Jerusalem over the whole earth! ( <sup>11</sup> )

So, Paul is **not** discussing a pre-incarnate eternal Son of God and a post-resurrection return to his original glory after temporal suffering and death. No, the resurrection separates the two time periods in the human life of the Son of God. This has occurred **according to a spirit of holiness** found in the man Jesus.

Do you realise that right now our glorified older brother, whom Yahweh has raised from the dead **still depends for his very life and existence on his God** and Father? Do you realise that the resurrected Son of God is not living by the power of his own innate Deity? Do you doubt what I say? Then what do you make of this verse: **For though he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by** ( ἐκ / ek = *lit. out from*) **the power of God** (2 Cor 13:4)? ( <sup>12</sup> )

The same idea is found later in **Romans** where we are told, **The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives** (i.e. post resurrection) **he lives to God** (6:10). Two phases! Two stages ... life and death before crucifixion (past tense verb) never to be repeated and life after being raised still dependent upon His God and Father for his ministry and existence! Before his crucifixion Jesus was already the Son of God — the Prince in waiting. After his resurrection Jesus is proclaimed to the world as the vindicated Son of God **with power, having been given all authority** as God's right hand man. What a story!

## SPACESUIT CHRISTOLOGY

In **The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God**, **R.P.C. Hanson** makes this informative observation about the popular teaching on "the Two Natures of Jesus" as proposed by **Athanasius**, one of the earliest apologists for the Deity of Christ:

<sup>11</sup> In fulfillment of the Oracle in **Ps 110:1** where David's lord (his own descendant) would sit at YHWH's right hand.

<sup>12</sup> The verb **he lives** (ζῆν) is a present, active, indicative, third person — meaning that every moment, indeed at this very moment, the risen Lord Jesus continues to live in total dependence for his very own life and existence by and from **the power of God**!

We must examine the manner in which Athenasius envisages the Incarnation as taking place: the *Logos* takes to himself a body as an instrument, as within this body he operates as he chooses, permitting the body to endure normal human experiences, **but himself unaffected by these experiences** ... We can properly describe this doctrine as a ‘**Space-suit Christology**’.

Just as the astronaut, in order to operate in a part of the universe where there is no air and where he has to experience weightlessness, puts on an elaborate space-suit which enables him to live and act in this new, unfamiliar environment, so **the *Logos* put on a body which enabled him to behave as a human being among human beings**. But his relation to this body is no closer than that of an astronaut to his space-suit. (2005, p447).

### IN SUM: CONTEXT CONCERNS TWO TIME-PERIODS — NOT TWO NATURES!

The subject of Paul’s introduction to the **Letter to the Romans** concerns how God has fulfilled His Gospel-promise to bring salvation to Jews and to Gentiles through a physical descendant of King David. God’s prophetic word has come to pass in **two phases, two time-periods, two stages**, in the ministry of the man Jesus the Christ.

The commonly-held belief that **Romans 1: 1ff** presents a “two-natured” Jesus robs our Lord of his true glory as a completely righteous, morally upright man, who lived his life by loyal obedience to his Father’s word and who has been rewarded for his **spirit of holiness**.

The “two natures” theory presents a false Christ who is neither the son of David (because he allegedly existed before his ancestor) nor the Son of God because he supposedly “co-existed” as God (but whom his Father would later bring into being)?!

To repeat: The Gospel of God is not authentic if we do not remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel (2 Tim 2:8). The Gospel is not about an astronaut parading among us with a **body no closer than that of an astronaut to his space-suit!**

To make **according to the flesh** mean “as to his human nature” and, to make **according to the Spirit of holiness** mean as to his eternal Deity, misses the context of Royal descent and moral fitness altogether. ( <sup>13</sup> )

**THE GREAT DEBATE** as to whether Paul introduces a “two natured” Jesus, a “God-man” in his introduction to the **Romans**, should be declared a fizzer! *That* story is a false gospel and should be repented of. So drop it!

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Paul uses the expression “**according to the flesh**” twenty-two times in his letters with various nuances: Rom 1:3; 4:1; 8:1,4,5,12 (twice); 9:3,5; 1 Cor 1:26; 10:18; 2 Cor 1:17; 5:16 (twice); 10:2,3; 11:18; Gal 4:23, 29; Eph 6:5; Col 3:22. The various nuances include, according to the dictates of our mortality, by society’s standards, by outward appearances, in a fickle and self-seeking way like unbelievers, in the natural manner, and as here in **Romans 1:3** according to lineage, or genealogy.

