

c. Paul's Gospel Concerned all the Nations (1:5)

According to Paul's gospel the Lord Jesus Christ - the promised, reigning Son of David; the resurrected, glorified Son of God invested with all power and authority; the Last Adam standing at the head of the new aeon of the Spirit - has established His kingdom and, with the outpouring of the Spirit, has begun His labors of calling men into it. Thus Paul could declare to the Romans that he had himself "*received grace and apostleship.*"

As one who had been delivered from the dominion of darkness and brought into Christ's kingdom, Paul had himself received the *grace* of forgiveness and life (Colossians 1:13-14). At the same time, his personal deliverance had been attended with Christ's call to be His ambassador and minister of grace to others; he had received the *apostleship* (cf. Acts 9:1-16; 1 Corinthians 1:1, 9:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Galatians 1:11-24; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; etc.).

- 1) Specifically, Christ's goal in giving to Paul the gift of the apostolic calling was that he should bring about the *obedience of faith*. This phrase is unique to the Roman epistle; its only other occurrence is in Paul's closing doxology (16:25-27). Its repetition there is noteworthy, for the doxology is constructed upon essentially the same content as his introductory remarks in 1:1-5. That is, Paul's gospel is the proclamation of Jesus Christ (1:1, 16:25a), which gospel represents "*the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past*" (16:25b). For though it was "*promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures*" (1:2), the gospel is only now manifested clearly with the coming of Christ. The same Old Testament Scriptures that previously proclaimed the gospel in a mystery now proclaim it manifestly to all the nations (16:26). And the goal of that revelation of the gospel to the entire world is the "*obedience of faith*" among all the nations (1:5, 16:26).

By "bookending" his epistle in this way Paul showed how thoroughly the gospel saturated his thought, life, and ministry. Even more, the same gospel truths form a kind of **alpha** and **omega**: *they are at the same time the necessary foundation for the epistle's sweeping treatment of redemption and the essence of its summarizing praise*. And because Romans is *pastoral* in its ultimate intent, these truths must be seen to also constitute an alpha and omega respecting the *Christian life*. By Paul's own insistence the gospel reality of Jesus Christ and Him crucified has both its design and its destiny in the *obedience of faith* (Ephesians 1:3-14).

This being so, it is readily evident that a right understanding of the phrase, "obedience of faith," is of paramount importance. For to misunderstand it is to potentially misunderstand the gospel itself. There are three ways it can be understood:

- a) The first and most common interpretation is to take the construction as presenting a subjective genitive. This means that the noun *faith* is to be viewed as the subject of the action expressed by the second noun *obedience*; i.e. faith acts in obedience. Thus the goal of the gospel is *faith's obedience*. The general support for this view is the biblical insistence that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:14-26).
- b) A closely related, though less likely, interpretation is based on the genitive *faith* being regarded as an ablative. In this instance, then, Paul was referring to the obedience that has its origin in faith. This understanding, too, has biblical support, for true obedience only proceeds out of genuine faith (Romans 14:1-23; Hebrews 11:1-31).
- c) The third option is to view the construction as indicating an appositional genitive. This means that the nouns *obedience* and *faith* refer in this context to the same thing, and are, therefore, interchangeable. In other words, Paul meant to say that the goal of the gospel is the obedience that is faith itself. This view can also be supported, inasmuch as the great work of obedience that God demands is that of faith in His Son. This is the very essence of repentance (cf. Mark 1:14-15; John 3:36, 6:24-29; Acts 19:1-4; Romans 10:1-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8).

Given the context, it is best to understand Paul's phrase as combining these ideas, with the third being fundamental. For while it is true that *faith* cannot, in the absolute sense, be made synonymous with *obedience*, it is biblically undeniable that faith is the single, great obligation of men with respect to God. For all sin is at its root *unbelief*, whether it's the sin of a lack of love for God or overt transgression of an explicit commandment (John 5:1-47, 8:31-47, 10:22-39, 15:18-25, 16:1-9; cf. Romans 1:18-32, 10:1-21, 11:1-27; Hebrews 3:1-4:7; etc.).

Even as faith always results in conformity of heart rather than mere outward compliance, so the absence of faith is the very essence of all disobedience. That is why Paul will later insist to his Roman readers that “*whatever is not from faith is sin*” (14:23). It does not matter what deeds a person performs or what doctrines he believes if he does not live by faith. Thus it is perfectly appropriate that Paul should have been speaking of the obedience that is trusting, submitted, and committed faith in Christ.

The correctness of this primary meaning becomes even more apparent when it is recalled that both contexts in which this phrase occurs are addressing the divine goal of the unveiling of the gospel to all the nations. The goal is not first and foremost their obedience as it pertains to certain commandments or prescriptions, *but their embrace of the gospel in faith*.