

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON TWELVE)

“THE BELIEVER AND PREACHER” (PART 2)

GALATIANS 1:15-16

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

15 But when the one who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased

16 to reveal his Son in me so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not go to ask advice from any human being.

Last week, we began to look at the picture of Paul, the **Believer** and **Preacher**. Having discussed his past character and conduct in verses **13** and **14**, Paul, in verses **15** and **16**, speaks about his conversion to Christianity:

15 But when the one who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased

16 to reveal his Son in me so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not go to ask advice from any human being.

In verse **15**, Paul explains that his conversion was the result of God “setting him apart” from birth, and “calling” him by His grace.

The Greek word translated “*separated*” or “*set apart*” is **aphorizó**: (**af-or-id’-zo**) which means, “to mark off from a boundary or line; to place a limitation upon, to fix limits around.” The idea is to appoint, or set apart one for some purpose. Paul is saying here that he was set apart by God

for salvation, and devoted to the apostleship, before he was born! After his conversion, it became obvious to him that God had sovereignly set him apart from birth, so that his entire life was a preparation to become a proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Clearly Paul did not choose God. It was God who chose Paul for salvation and to be His apostle.

The Greek word translated “*called*” is **kaleo (kal-eh’-o)**, which is used in the New Testament to refer to the divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption. The word means more than a mere invitation. It is a divine summons. The ones summoned are made willing to obey the summons, not against their will but with their free will and consent. It is an effectual call. The one who is so called, always responds positively.

When we speak of the “call of God” we are referring to the process by which the soul, which was dead in trespasses and sins, hears the voice of God and is translated out of death into life. In **John 5:24-25** our Lord speaks of this process:

24 “I tell you the solemn truth, the one who hears my message and believes the one who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life.

25 I tell you the solemn truth, a time is coming—and is now here—when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

(New English Translation)

This “call of God” or “hearing the voice of the Son of God” is synonymous with regeneration. When God issues His summons to a person, he or she is “born from above” or “born again!”

As a result of him receiving the divine summons, Paul was converted. In the context of **Galatians 1:15**, the word “*called*” also refers to God’s special plan for Paul’s life work. What God had planned for Paul to do was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul is explaining to the Galatian believers who were being troubled by the legalistic teaching of the Judaizers, that his election and call were products of God's grace.

Paul says that God was, "*pleased to reveal his Son*" in him. The word "*pleased*" is the translation of a Greek word which means, "to think it good, choose, determine, decide: to be well pleased with, take pleasure in." Paul is explaining to his readers that the intervention of God in his life was neither sought nor deserved by him. In **Romans 9:16** he writes, "*So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it*" (**New Living Translation**).

His salvation and his calling resulted from God's choice and God's determination. For some reason, known only to God Himself, He took pleasure in Paul and set His love upon him. Paul understood this very well and that is why, whenever he spoke or wrote about his conversion and his ministry, he always emphasized the fact that it was God who did the work. For example, in **1 Corinthians 15:8-10**, he writes,

8 Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been in vain. In fact, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

(New English Translation)

The **Message** translates the passage in the following way:

8 and that he finally presented himself alive to me.

9 It was fitting that I bring up the rear. I don't deserve to be included in that inner circle, as you well know, having spent all those early years trying my best to stamp God's church right out of existence.

10 But because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I'm not about to let his grace go to waste. Haven't I worked hard trying to do more than any of the others? Even then, my work didn't amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it.

The call of God expresses His nature. He calls those whom He has chosen, and He chooses those whom He pleases to choose.

Oswald Chambers makes the following pertinent comments regarding God's election and calling: "God gets me into a relationship with Himself whereby I understand His call, then I do things out of sheer love for Him on my own account. To serve God is the deliberate love-gift of a nature that has heard the call of God...The Son of God reveals Himself in me, and I serve Him in the ordinary ways of life out of devotion to Him."

What does Paul say that God was pleased to do? He was pleased to "reveal" His Son, Jesus Christ in him.

The word "reveal" is a translation of the Greek word **apokaluptó**: (**ap-ok-al-ooop'-to**), which means, "to uncover, lay open what has been veiled or covered up; to disclose, make bare." Figuratively **apokaluptó** means, "to make known, make manifest, disclose, what before was unknown." The word refers to the disclosure of something by the removal of that which had previously concealed it, and refers especially to a subjective revelation to an individual. In the case of Paul, the idea is to remove that which concealed the truth concerning Jesus Christ—the truth that He was the Messiah prophesied of throughout the Old Testament, the Redeemer of Israel and his personal Saviour.

Paul is not saying here that God called him in order that He might reveal the Lord Jesus Christ to the world through Paul. Rather, Paul desires for his readers to understand that God called him in order that He might

reveal the Lord Jesus Christ personally to him! Paul is speaking here, **not** of an **objective** revelation but of a **subjective** revelation.

What we are dealing with here is an **internal** revelation. Paul is emphasizing his **inward** experience of the grace of God in revealing to him the true nature and character of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Person and work, which had previously been hidden from him.

The Australian theologian **Leon Morris** has an interesting note on the phrase, "*in me.*" He says, "What begins by being a revelation of Christ to Paul becomes a revelation of Christ in Paul as the Spirit produces his fruit in unaccustomed soil." The entire context has to do, not with how Paul **preached** the Gospel, but how he **received** it.

What is certain is that Paul would not have been able to so effectively preach Christ among the Gentiles without the rich inward experience of having Jesus Christ revealed "*in him!*"

Paul makes a distinction here between the **call** and the **revelation**. The revelation of which he speaks in verse **16**, is not to be identified with the vision of the Lord Jesus which he had on the Damascus road. The vision on the Damascus road was perceived by the eye. When he speaks about God revealing His Son in Him, he is speaking about an **inward** revelation, which is perceived by the spiritual senses. Here again, Paul is making it clear that he could not have been dependent upon human beings for his apostolic ministry and message.

Brothers and sisters, if we are to be effective witnesses for Christ, we must not merely know **about** Him. We must know Him. He must be "revealed in us" as was the case with Paul. The more we know Him, the more authentically we can represent Him to the world. In **Philippians 3:8-14**, Paul speaks of his deep, supreme desire to know Jesus Christ. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

8 More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I may gain Christ,

9 and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ's faithfulness.

10 My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death,

11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me.

13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead,

14 with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

In Ephesians 3:14-21, He informs the believers in Ephesus that he is praying for them in the same vein:

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

16 I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he will grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person,

17 that Christ will dwell in your hearts through faith, so that, because you have been rooted and grounded in love,

18 you will be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

19 and thus to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you will be filled up to all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do far beyond all that we ask or think,

21 to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

(New English Translation)

God revealed Christ **in** Paul and **to** Paul, before He revealed Christ **through** Paul. God chose Paul to preach among the Gentiles the same grace that he had experienced, and it was important for him to experience it before he preached it. This, in itself, is evidence that Paul's conversion was of God; for certainly a prejudiced Jewish rabbi would never decide in and of himself to minister to the despised Gentiles!

Commenting on God's choice of Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles, **David Guzik** writes the following: "This shows that God has a sense of humor. He selected a man before he was born for the job of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. That man grew up hating Gentiles, probably believing as some (not all) other Jewish people did in his day: that the only reason God made Gentiles was so they would fuel the fires of hell."

Brothers and sisters, it is important for us to understand that God does not elect and call persons just to prevent them from spending eternity in a lake of fire instead of in his presence. Every believer has been saved in order to be useful in the service of the Lord. In **Ephesians 2:10**, Paul informs us that, "*we are his creative work, having been created in*

Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them” (New English Translation). And according to **1 Peter 2:9**, every believer is charged with the responsibility of proclaiming the virtues of the one who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. We have been redeemed so that we may be witnesses of our Redeemer. Are we fulfilling the purpose for which we were called out of darkness into His marvelous light?

Brothers and sisters, we today do not need unrevealed truth to be communicated to us, as was the case with the apostles and prophets of the First Century church. We have the **full** revelation of Scriptural truth in our Bibles. God has no new revelation to give any of us! What we need is the revelation of Christ within us. We need Him to illuminate truth to our hearts that have already been revealed in Scripture, truths concerning His person and His work, truths that will radically affect the way that we think about Him and the way that we worship and serve Him.