

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON ELEVEN)

“THE BELIEVER AND PREACHER”

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.

We have noted in previous Lessons that verse **11** marks a new section of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In this section, he relates his personal experiences to his readers in an effort to defend his right to preach the Gospel of grace. He informs his readers that the Gospel that he preached is not a human invention. By implication, he is claiming that His Gospel is completely divine in origin, and as such it counters all the theories of salvation contrived by the fleshly wisdom of fallen unregenerate human beings, who in some shape or form always add works as a means of attaining salvation. Both Paul’s mission and his message are independent of human beings since both were received directly from God.

In verse **12**, Paul categorically states that he did not receive the Gospel from a human source: *“I did not receive it or learn it from any human source.”* These were the methods by which the majority of the believers and even the teachers of the believers had received the Gospel. But these were not the methods by which Paul received it. His case was exceptional. He received it, he says, *“by a revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

God chose to reveal Himself and His message to Paul in a unique way. Both his message and his apostolic ministry were divinely given. Therefore, anybody who added anything to the Gospel that he preached was in danger of divine judgment.

The best way for Paul to prove his point is to reach into his past and remind the Galatian believers of the way that God had dealt with him. His past life was already known to his readers, but it was obvious that they did not fully understand what those experiences meant. So, Paul flashes on the screen three pictures from his past, the **Persecutor**, the **Believer** and the **Preacher**. He flashes these three pictures as evidence that his apostleship and his Gospel are truly of God.

Last week we looked at verses **13** and **14**. In these verses we see a picture of Saul the **Persecutor**. In this week's Lesson, we will begin 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.

Warren Wiesrbe writes the following in respect of Paul's conversion: "No matter how you look at it, the conversion of Paul was a spiritual miracle. It was humanly impossible for Rabbi Saul to become the Apostle Paul apart from the miracle of God's grace. And the same God who saved Paul also called him to be an apostle, and gave him the message of the Gospel. For the Judaizers to deny Paul's apostleship and Gospel was the same as denying his conversion! Certainly Paul was preaching...the truth that had changed him. But no mere human message could effect such a change. Paul's argument is conclusive: his past conduct as a persecutor of the church plus the dramatic change

that he experienced prove that his message and ministry are from God."

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 **King James Version** translates the verse as follows: "*But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me 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.

The impression one gets from the rendering of the **King James Version** is that the word refers to the physical separation of a child from its mother's womb, which is **not** the idea Paul's mind. The idea in his mind is, "who set me apart and devoted me to a special purpose from before my birth, and before I had any desires or principles of my own." Paul is saying that he was set apart by God for salvation, and devoted to the apostleship, before he was born! This is further evidence of his independence of the twelve original apostles. After his conversion, it became obvious to Paul 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.

We see a similar divine choosing in the life of the prophet Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 1:4-5**. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

4 The LORD's message came to me,

5 "Before I formed you in your mother's womb I chose you. Before you were born I set you apart. I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations."

It is clear that what we are dealing with in both the case of Paul and Jeremiah is **Sovereign Election**. In “**Systematic Theology, Biblical and Historical**,” **R.D. Culver** defined the election of God in the following way: “Election is the eternal act of God with respect to all who are saved, by which, out of pure grace and for Christ’s sake He purposed to endow them in time with the spiritual blessings of conversion, justification, sanctification, and preservation unto eternal life.”

The **Doctrine of Election** refers to God’s decisive initiative in the salvation of human beings. The salvation of human beings ultimately rests with God and not with us. God’s election is sovereign. It does not rest upon the foreseen decisions or responses of human beings. Indeed, the responses of human beings to the Gospel flow from the sovereign grace of God.

Left to themselves, no human being would ever choose God. How could they choose Him, if, according to **Ephesians 2:1**, they are “*dead in trespasses and sins?*”

In **John 15:16**, Jesus said the following to His disciples: “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that remains, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you*” (**New English Translation**). Is it possible for anything to be clearer? “*You did not choose me, but I chose you!*” This is true, both in respect of our election to salvation and our ordination to an office. Jesus Christ did not choose us because we first chose Him any more than He loved us because we first loved Him. It was true then, and it is true now, it is Jesus Christ who has to initiate our fellowship with Him. He has to do the choosing. In all the cases of friendship between Christ and human beings, the origination and initiation come from Him. As **1 John 4:19** states, “*We love because he loved us first.*”

The Scriptures make it very clear that election to salvation is in no way conditioned by, or dependent upon, anything that distinguishes the saved from the unsaved prior to the day of their effectual calling to become members of the family of God. The grace of God does not search for persons who are willing to accept it, for no fallen, unregenerate human being is ever willing to accept the grace of God. The grace of God does not **find** persons willing, rather it **makes** them willing, for none would be willing otherwise. This is what Paul is trying to tell us in **Romans 9:15-16**:

15 For he says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

16 So then, it does not depend on human desire or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.

(New English Translation)

Thus the "separation" or "setting apart" of Paul from birth was an act of sovereign grace.

The Greek word translated "*called*" is **kaleo (kal-eh'-o)**. According to **Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, the word **kaleo** is used particularly of the divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption. The word **kaleo** was used in the first century as a technical word in legal practice, and meant "an official summons," as in the case of the summoning of a witness to court. 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 again” or “born from above!”

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to recognize that there are **two** calls spoken of in the Bible which must be carefully differentiated from each other. There is an **outward** call that is **universal**, and there is an **inward** call that is **specific** to the elect, and which produces life in them.

The **outward** call comes to human beings in the proclamation of the gospel. Our Lord refers to this **outward** call in **Matthew 22:14**. He says, *“For many are called, but few are chosen.”* The Greek word translated “called” in this verse is not **kaleo**, the divine summons of **Galatians 1:15**. The word used in **Matthew 22:14** is **kletos** (**klay-tos**). According to **Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, the word **kletos** is used to speak of an **invitation**. It is used “of the call of the gospel.” It is **not** used to refer to “an effectual call.”

The **inward** call of God is the **effect** of His eternal foreknowledge and predestination to conform those whom He has chosen to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. But, this **inward** call of God is also the **actual** cause, the **actual** means, the **actual** implementation of the eternal purpose whereby we are conformed to the image of God’s Son. The inward call is therefore the same as regeneration or the new birth, the birth from above.

Those who have been **inwardly** called (**kaleo**), go about proclaiming the **outward** call (**kletos**), to all men. The Lord Jesus ordained that we should do this in **Matthew 28:19-20**. Human beings are used of God to give the **outward** call, but only God can give the **inward** call. The **outward** call can, and is often rejected, but the **inward** call is always obeyed.

We would not be doing violence to the Word of God if we were to paraphrase **Matthew 22:14** in the following manner: “Many are called **outwardly**, but few are called **inwardly**.”

This call does not merely command the dead to come out of their graves. This call imparts life, life that is so powerful that it raises the dead and permanently transfers the sinner from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God’s Son!

It is possible for a person to hear the **outward** call and make a **profession** of faith. He or she may submit to water baptism and even claim to have received a supernatural experience. But they are not **possessors** of faith. Such persons may become members of the **visible** church.

Those who hear the **inward** call and are therefore converted, become members of the **invisible** Church, the “true ecclesia.” Hearing and responding to the **outward** call only, may have the effect of uniting us to a group of professing believers; but the **inward** call unites us to Jesus Christ Himself, and to all those who have been genuinely saved.

The **outward** call may bring with it a certain intellectual knowledge of the truth and produce external changes and a conformity to creeds and standards; the **inward** call does much more. The **inward** call brings with it a radical heart change; it brings with it the faith and the hope which anchors us forever to Jesus Christ; it brings with it a love which always draws us back to Him who first loved us. The **inward** call will gradually conform us to the image of Jesus Christ and will, one day, cause us to be glorified.

Paul heard both the **outward** call and the **inward call**. As a result of him hearing the inward call he 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.

Martin Luther put the following words into the mouth of Paul: “By the favor of God I, a wicked and cursed wretch, a blasphemer, persecutor, and rebel, was spared. Not content to spare me, God granted unto me the knowledge of His salvation, His Spirit, His Son, the office of an apostle, everlasting life.”

Luther then goes on to say, “God not only pardoned our iniquities, but in addition overwhelmed us with blessings and spiritual gifts. Many, however, are ungrateful. Worse, by opening again a window to the devil many begin to loathe God’s Word, and end by perverting the Gospel... “Did God call me on account of my holy life? Or on account of my pharisaical religion? Or on account of my prayers, fastings, and works? Never. Well, then, it is certain God did not call me on account of my blasphemies, persecutions, oppressions. What prompted Him to call me? His grace alone.”

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