

Gal. 1:11-17; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Called to Holy Service I. Set Apart for a Purpose II. Called by His Grace III. Called to Preach

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you have a calling? In the past, Christians have often spoken of a sacred calling- like being called into the ministry or called the mission field. But if you are not a pastor or missionary, do you still receive a calling from God? Is there a connection between our salvation and our calling to serve? Today we return to Gal. 1 where we find Paul retelling of his calling. But as we consider the call that Paul received; we also find a pattern the is evident in our lives as well. In other words, what happened to Paul in specific can be applied to us all generally. We will be focussing in a very specific part of the golden chain of salvation today. We will see our election and our effectual calling. So we consider this theme: the Father sovereignly calls His people to sacred service. Our text focusses on v. 15- 16.

### **I. Set Apart for a Purpose**

In our first point we see that Paul was set apart by God for a special purpose. As v. 15 says, He set me apart. The “He” here is the Father. The work of setting apart is to consecrate someone. This was normally done by anointing then with oil in the OT. In other words, Paul was appointed- marked by the Father for a special work. This setting apart took place before Paul had been born- before Paul had done anything good or ill- the Father had set Paul apart from others for a distinct work. In this way, Paul is similar to the OT prophet Jeremiah as we read in Jeremiah 1: 5, before I formed you I knew you. Before you were born, I consecrated you- I appointed you a prophet to the nations. So Paul, like Jeremiah, was set apart by the Father before birth. Now the opening word of verse 15 is very important. When Paul says “but when” he is contrasting the work of God the Father to his own work in the previous verses. You can see that in v. 14 Paul has been focussing on his own work- his own merit and effort. How he was the best Pharisee- very zealous in his work and seeking the praise of man. Even the word “Pharisee” means one who is set apart. But when God set Paul apart, this setting apart was not based

on the work of Paul. So the contrast is between human advancement and effort and that of the choosing of God before Paul worked- even before Paul was born. Election and consecration by the Father is not based on human effort or works. God does not wait for Paul to prove himself before He chooses him. He was set apart in the womb. As Paul would say in Eph. 1:4- we are chosen before the foundation of the world. Foreknown by the Father. Election is not based on what we have or can do. Jacob was loved while Esau was hated before either had done anything at all. So Paul being set apart as an apostle is a work of the Father alone. The basis of our election is found completely in God's good pleasure. As Eph. 1:5 will continue- we are chosen according to the purpose of His will. So Paul was chosen- appointed and consecrated- set apart for sacred work- because it pleased the Father. We could ask ourselves- why has God chosen you? Why did God set His love upon you before you did anything? Before you were born? Well, He marks His people and sets them apart as distinct because it pleases Him! For His purpose and according to His design! Before we move into our second point, there is a clear application here. God chose you and appointed you for service before you did anything! This is a humbling, God exalting truth! Why did God choose you- why does God see fit to use you in His kingdom? Only because it pleases Him! For His good pleasure! Praise God for His good desire and design He has for us!

## **II. Called by His Grace**

Paul continues then in v. 15, Paul was set apart before he was born, and has now been called by God's grace. To be called is to be summoned by name- to be called and brought near. This calling by the Father also takes place when it pleased God. In His time, Paul was called by the Father. And in case we miss this point, this calling was one that Paul received "by the grace of God." So to link this point to the previous- why are you chosen by the Father? Because it pleases God. Why are you called and regenerated by God? Because it pleases God! Now we have to make a few distinctions. What is this calling that Paul received? He was called by the grace of God. The calling that a person receives can

refer to various events, messages and people that God uses to lead you to faith repentance. We would call this the external call. Paul had been called by God when the Son met and spoke with Jesus on the road to Damascus and the following vision. Although Paul was unique in that his external call had been received from God Himself, it is true that we have all received the call to faith and repentance from God. Although we do not hear the audible voice of our Savoir, God does still call us repent and believe as He speaks to us through the preaching. If you were to look back on your live you could likely identify people, messages and events that God used to call you to Himself. So a calling from God is a way to describe the call from God to follow Him. But this external call must be accompanied by the internal call as well. The internal call which is sometimes called the effectual calling of God is the work of the Holy Spirit where the gospel heard is applied to the heart. This internal calling is an event that happens in time- when a person is called to God by God. We respond by the Spirit with faith and repentance. The sovereign plan of God is brought to bear and a change takes place within. Being called by the grace of God enables our eyes to see Jesus. As v. 16 continues- God was pleased to reveal the Son him. When you are called by God, the Son is revealed to you. You see Jesus- you know Jesus- you love Jesus! When the Son is seen, the sinner is changed. Remember that it was the Greeks who stated- sirs, we would see Jesus. An important aspect of truth faith is seeing Jesus rightly! Knowing Him in truth. So as a part of the Spirit's work within, the Son is revealed to us. We see Him with the eyes of faith. This leads to a change within us as well. We are transformed as we look at Jesus. We are illuminated by the Spirit to know the truth and the truth sets us free. The more you see Jesus, the more Jesus is seen in you. Being called leads to a holy life of service. This call of God is both particular and effective. Specific and powerful. As Rom. 8 puts it, we are called according to His purpose.

### **III. Sent to Preach**

This calling now leads to a new life of obedience. Having considered that Paul was called by the grace of God, in our last point we see that He was sent to preach. Being called unto salvation cannot be

separated from a calling to obedience and service. Now I do not want to be confusing here- we are using the word “calling” in two separate ways. First, as we saw in our 2<sup>nd</sup> point, Paul was called by God as the Spirit works within and enables Paul to see Jesus and respond with faith and repentance. But in this our third point, we see that after being called by the grace of God Paul was also sent to preach. We sometimes call this a person’s calling! So as v. 16 reads, after seeing Jesus Paul was sent to preach Him among the Gentiles. As Jeremiah was appointed as a prophet to the nations, Paul was sent as an apostle to the Gentiles. Now children, the word “Gentiles” simply means someone who was not a Jew. Paul’s primary focus will be to preach the gospel to those who come from every nation except the people of Israel. Paul’s normal process would be to enter a city and start preaching in the synagogue- he would reason with the Jews as he proved to them that Jesus was the Christ. But when they Jews rejected the preaching and responded with hostility, Paul would shake off the dust from his feet and go to the Gentiles as he did in Acts 18. God had commissioned and sent Paul to be a preacher to the Gentiles in order that the Gentiles might see and know Jesus as well. As we can see, receiving God’s grace makes us willing and fit for service! There is such a close connection between salvation and service here. Being set apart and called by God- Paul dutifully goes out to preach the Word in season and out of season. Preaching the full counsel of God to those to whom he was sent. Having known the Son, Paul now makes the Son known to others! Notice the dramatic shift that takes place between v. 13 and v. 16. In v. 13 Paul was persecuting the church violently. Paul was seeing to destroy the church and to kill the followers of Christ! Now Paul is preaching about Christ. Instead of persecuting, Paul is seeking to build the church! Instead of killing the saints, Paul himself is one who seeks to minister to them! What can account for this change? What can turn a persecutor to a preacher? Nothing but the grace of God! Only the Holy Spirit can take a hard, rebellious heart and turn it into a fit vessel of grace! And although we are not all called to be preachers in the formal sense, everyone who has seen Jesus will reflect Jesus! Everyone who has heard His voice will echo His praise! We all have been appointed by the Father for a

specific task of praise Him. We have been called by the Father through the Spirit to know and see Jesus. Now we are sent out into this world to serve Him. May we be like Isaiah who when called replied- here am I LORD, send me!

To conclude, II Peter 1:10 describes this process of change in the reverse order. Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these things you will never fall. Convinced of our calling we work out of our salvation. The good fruit of obedience is one of the proofs that we are alive! The change that happened to Paul and his life bears this out. If Paul can be set apart by the Father, called and sent out to preach; anyone can be! If the chief of sinners can be saved- so can you! But through it all, the ground of our salvation remains the good pleasure of God! Paul was- and you are chosen because of His good pleasure and design! The Father sovereignly calls His people to sacred service.