

The Call to Preach

1:1 Paul a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

I. Prior to Paul's Call: His testimony before hand

The apostle Paul said that God called him to be an apostle. Paul was called in Acts 9. Before the Lord called Saul to be the apostle Paul, Saul was present when Stephen preached a great sermon that would be condemned by most modern apostate Christians because Stephen was “unkind” and “harsh” and was not “loving.” However the Bible says that Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 7:55).

You see people forget that the first work of the Holy Ghost is to reprove of sin (John 16:8-11). The scripture says that those that heard Holy Ghost preaching were “cut to the heart” (Acts 7:54). True biblical preaching utilizes that sharp two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) and that sword will cut you one-way or the other. It will either cut off the foreskin of your heart allowing you to worship, walk, and work the way God would have you to be or it will prick your heart and conscience and stick you and wound you that it might bring you to repentance.

People think that if someone is offended by preaching, there is something wrong with the preacher or with what is being said. That is incorrect. Now I understand that people can preach with a wrong heart attitude, nevertheless, if what is being preached is what that book says, the problem is not with the preacher or his message, the problem is with the hearer. That is why anyone who is called to preach, from the get go, ought to set out that he is going to please God with his preaching, and preach what God wants him to preach, regardless of man's opinion or reaction. Paul said that the preaching ought to please Christ and not man (Galatians 1:10) and sometimes that means men aren't going to be pleased with what a preacher says: so be it. If they were walking in the Light, as he is in the Light, the word of God being preached shouldn't bother them one bit. Amen.

Paul was consenting unto Stephen's death in Acts 8:1 and in Acts 9:1, we find that Paul was threatening and slaughtering Christians. He says in Acts 26:9-11 that he thought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And Paul actually did so, in putting the saints in prison, putting the saints to death, compelling them to blaspheme and was exceedingly mad against them and persecuted them all over the place. In Philippians 3:1-6 Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, he had zeal in that he persecuted the church of God, and he was blameless insofar as touching the righteousness of the law was concerned. He was a Pharisee, which according to scripture was the straightest sect of the Jews religion (Acts 26:5). This was Paul's testimony before the Lord called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

II. Paul's call

We read about Paul's call to be an apostle in Acts 9:1-22, Acts 22:6-16, and Acts 26:12-18. Saul was on the road to Damascus. His purpose for going there was to find disciples

of the Lord and bring them bound unto Jerusalem for judgment. As he went his way, “there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:3-6).

Saul sees a light brighter than the sun shining round about him and it blinded him. Who was the man clothed in light? It was Jesus! The Lord Jesus called him by name and asked why he was persecuting him. Now let’s pause right there for a second. Did you get that or did you miss that? Jesus says, when the saints of God are persecuted, the persecutors are not persecuting the saints, they are actually persecuting the Lord Jesus Christ. I don’t know about you but after I had been saved, I was persecuted because of the Lord, but they weren’t persecuting me, they were persecuting him. And the Bible says we are blessed when we are persecuted for his sake because great is our reward in heaven (Matthew 5:11-12). We ought to rejoice and count it a blessing to suffer reproach for his name’s sake.

Saul then asks, “Who art thou, Lord?” This is an interesting response from Saul. Now Saul knew there was a God and that the only God was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: the God of Israel, the LORD of hosts, Jehovah. He knew those things. But when Paul asks, “Who art thou, Lord?” it seems to me that Paul was wondering who the Lord really was. He wanted to know. It just may be that the Holy Ghost of God had been working on Saul’s heart for some time about believing in Jesus (John 16:8-11). When this started one can only guess. If Paul was a big shot in the Jew’s religion, which he was, he must have known and heard about Jesus of Nazareth before Stephen’s preaching in Acts 7. Regardless of one you mark down when the Spirit started reproving Saul for his sin of unbelief in Jesus, the passage makes clear the Lord had been dealing with Saul for some amount of time before he went on to Damascus.

Notice in Acts 9:5, The Lord says that he is Jesus; the one Saul has been persecuting this whole time. Then the Lord says something that cut to the heart of Paul. This was an example of that proverb which says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Jesus then says something to Paul that only the Lord and Paul knew about. He says, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

What does this mean? It means that the Paul kept bucking or going against the pricks that the Holy Ghost had been impressing upon his conscience. The Lord kept pricking his heart and pricking his heart for what he was doing towards the saints, and for his unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah long before Damascus. In Acts 2:37 after the multitude of Jews from many nations heard Peter preach, they were “pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Compare that with Acts 9:5-6. The proper response after being convicted of the Holy Ghost is to say, Lord you got me, and then ask the Lord, what do you want me to do?

Amen! That word pricked in the Bible has to do with being convicted when hearing the preaching of the word of God (see Psalm 73, Acts 2:37, Acts 9:5, Acts 26:14).

What Jesus says in Acts 9:5 is an allusion to an ox kicking against the goad by which he is driven. A goad is a pointed instrument that was used by the driver to urge forward the ox. When an ox would kick against the prick by the goad, the ox did not hurt the goad, but only hurt himself. The ox was going against the direction of the driver: he was rebelling. Now the Lord is the driver and we are the oxen, and the word of God being the sharp two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) is the goad, and the Lord will prick our hearts with his word and we have the choice to follow the Lord's direction or "kick against the pricks of our conscience." The latter is to our hurt; the former is to our gain.

Solomon said this in Ecclesiastes 12:11-12, "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." The words of the wise are sharp and will prick us when we go astray or need to go further or in another direction, and they are given from one shepherd. Do you know who that shepherd is? I do. The next verse says we are to be admonished by these words that are as goads. We are to receive instruction, and warning, and counsel from these. If something from the word of the Lord pricks our conscience, say, Lord, what do you want me to do about this thing? That is the biblical response. Don't kick against the pricks because when you do, you are resisting the Holy Ghost (Acts 7:51).

So Jesus says to Saul, is it hard for thee to kick against the pricks. That must mean that Saul was rebelling against the pricks of his conscience. The Holy Ghost was dealing with Saul long before Acts 9. Saul heard Stephen preach in Acts 7, Saul was cut to the heart (Acts 7:54). Saul started to persecute the church of God, and I bet the Spirit of God bothered him about it. Then one day, as he was on his way to persecute the disciples of the Lord, the Lord knocks him on his face and says, is it hard for thee to kick against the pricks. At this point Saul is done, he is trembling and astonished and says what do you want me to do Lord? And the Lord said, get up and go into the city and it shall be told to you there what you must do. Amen.

So Saul gets up and when he opens his eyes he realizes he is blind. They lead him to Damascus and there he waits for three days without sight and not having food or drink. Then the Lord speaks to Ananias in a vision and tells him to go see Saul and heal his eye sight. So Ananias goes and finds Saul and heals his eye sight and gets baptized. If you compare the parallel accounts of Saul's call, we find in Acts 22:16, that Ananias tells him to rise up and get baptized, and wash away his sins, calling upon the name of the Lord. What took away his sins? Calling upon the name of the Lord. Amen. In this day and age water baptism does not remit sins, but calling upon the name of the Lord does.

What was Saul called to do? What did Jesus want Paul to do? Saul was to be a chosen vessel for the Lord and was to bear his name before the Gentiles, kings, and the

children of Israel and that he was going to suffer great things for his name's sake (Acts 9:15-16) He was to know God's will and see the Just One, and should hear the voice of his mouth, and be a witness unto all men of what he has seen and heard (Acts 22:14-15). He was to be a minister of what he has seen and the things which the Lord would show him later, being sent to the Gentiles to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God in order that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Jesus (Acts 26:16-18). This was Saul's call. This is what the Lord wanted him to do. Saul was obedient to the heavenly vision, and forsook all and followed Jesus.

III. The Call to Preach

Paul said he was called to be an apostle and was separated unto the gospel of God. Briefly I want to discuss the call to preach. There are three things that I find to be consistent among those whom the Lord called to preach his word: 1) The call to preach comes out of nowhere, (2) none of those whom the Lord called were looking to be called, (3) and the men the Lord called were faithful in whatever they were doing prior to being called.

First let us consider the 12 apostles. Before they became apostles what were they doing? They were working to make a living. Some were fishing, some were collecting taxes: they were busy working. They were providing for their families by the sweat of their brow. They were not looking to be apostles; they were just doing what they knew they were supposed to do. They were working for quite some time I would imagine. Then out of nowhere the Lord shows up and says, Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. How did these men respond? They immediately forsook their nets and followed Jesus. Isn't that a strange thing? Don't you find it odd that the Lord did not choose a recognized religious leader and authority to be one of his disciples? He chose common, ordinary people to be his apostles. Were these men looking to be called of God? Doesn't appear so.

Consider some of the Old Testament prophets. How about Moses? When Moses is 80 years old, God calls him to be a prophet and a deliverer for the children of Israel. Prior to the burning bush, Moses spent 40 years in Egypt as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He ends up killing a man and flees into the land of Midian and dwells there, gets married, has a child, and keeps the flock of his father in law Jethro. Then one day out of nowhere the Lord calls Moses out of the burning bush. Did Moses seek to be the deliverer of the children of Israel? Did he seek to be the mediator of the Old Testament? Did he seek to be a prophet? I don't think so. In fact for a while Moses told God that he couldn't do it because he wasn't an eloquent speaker.

What about David? Before the Lord called him to be king over all Israel what was he doing. Was he seeking to be king? No, not at all. What was he doing? He was keeping his father's sheep. He was busy working, doing what he knew to do to be right. Then out of nowhere one day the prophet Samuel shows up and anoints David king and the Spirit of God came upon him from that day forward.

What about Jonah? He clearly wasn't looking to be called of God. As soon as the word of God came to him, he fled to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. It appears to me that the people God called to preach his word were busy doing something else and not seeking to be called of God to be a preacher, then one day out of nowhere the word of the Lord just shows up to them and then they obey the Lord and follow him.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ's calling: the Father called him to be a high priest and the Bible says no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron (Hebrews 5:4). The Lord wasn't seeking this position, but God called him to be a faithful high priest for us. And notice before Jesus was called to "the ministry", he was working as a carpenter for over a decade (Luke 3:23, Mark 6:3). Do you see that? The men God called in the Bible, even his only begotten Son, worked for a living and did what was right to do way before they were called into the ministry. Now the scripture does say if any man desires the office of a bishop he desires a good work (1 Timothy 3:1). But just because you desire it doesn't mean you are called to be a bishop, you must meet certain qualifications that are laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

You need to understand this: a burden or desire is not necessarily a calling. I know when I was first saved, I was like Paul, and had a great burning desire for Jews to get saved (Romans 10:1). At one point I actually thought that God was calling me to be a missionary to Israel or to the Jewish people. Then the Lord showed me this thing about the apostle Paul, a burden or desire does not equate to a calling. Paul's heart's desire was for the Jew to be saved and he wanted to go to them, but God sent him to the Gentiles and called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Sure Paul preached every now and then to the Jews but God called him to go preach to the Gentiles. Also when Paul disobeyed the instruction of the Holy Ghost and went to Jerusalem, he was taken away in chains and bound up which led him to his death in Rome. You need to understand a burden is not necessarily a calling. Jonah had absolutely no burden or care at all for Nineveh to repent, but God called him to go and preach to them, and eventually he did.

Lastly, the men God called to preach his word were all faithful men. There are many verses that state these men were faithful in whatever they were doing prior to their calling. We will look at a few. The apostle Paul said this, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (1 Timothy 1:12). Faithfulness is a prerequisite for being put into the ministry. God requires faithfulness. How about Moses? The Bible says he was faithful in all his house (Hebrews 3:5). What about Jesus? He was faithful to him that appointed him (Hebrews 3:2). The men God called for particular tasks were all faithful men. That was one of the characteristics these men had. They were faithful.

Those that are called of God to preach have these three things in common: 1) The call to preach comes out of nowhere, (2) none of those whom the Lord called were looking to be called, (3) and the men the Lord called were faithful in whatever they were doing prior to being called.