

RECEIVING NEW LIFE IN CHRIST - Calling

This week we turn a big corner in our studies thus far. We've been looking at *God's side* in the work of Redemption (everything from *revelation, creation, and providence*, to the *Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus*). Today we begin to study *how all of this is applied to individual people* - how we *appropriate* God's grace and provision. We will begin by studying the subject of *our calling in Christ* (dealt with in Scripture under such headings as *calling, election, choosing, predestination, etc.*). The question that looks so simple on the surface, but which is actually very involved, is this: *Why are you a Christian while your neighbour is an atheist?*

- 1) **THE CHALLENGE IS TO TAKE SERIOUSLY ALL THE BIBLE SAYS ON THE SUBJECT** - At first glance, different Scriptures seem to tell a different story: **Romans 8:29** - "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." **2 Thessalonians 2:14** - "To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such texts stress the sovereign choice of God in bringing about our salvation.

But there are other verses to consider as well: **Isaiah 65:12** - "I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in." Or, **Matthew 22:1-10** - "And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, [2] "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, [3] and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. [4] Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' [5] But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, [6] while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. [7] The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. [8] Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. [9] Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' [10] And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests."

If nothing else stands out here, these texts, at the very least, seem to assign a determining role in the *response* of the individual to the invitations of God in Christ. The way many theologians have traditionally dealt with this is to talk about *two separate calls of God* (His *general* or *universal call* and His *effectual call*), or *God's two wills* (His *permissive* will and His *descriptive* will). His *universal call* goes out to all mankind, and isn't favourably received by many. His *effectual call* goes only to the *elect* and *always* results in the salvation of the one to whom it is extended.

Important to note in this explanation is the *kind* of freedom we have in our response to God's call. In fairness, we are not *coerced* in this scenario. We have no *perception* of being forced to choose against our will. However, we are *not* free to *want* anything other than what God decreed from the foundation of the world. People who do not *want* God's grace in Christ could never have wanted it (even if they *wanted* to want it, which they could never do). This is called *soft determinism*. You are free to do what you *want*. But you could never have *wanted* anything different.

There are many fine Christians who hold devoutly to this view. My personal perspective is this view leaves too many questions unanswered. *Why does God call some people effectually and others only generally?* And what is the *purpose* of a general call which *can't* possibly be responded to favourably? God certainly *knows* this in advance. Is this to establish God's *justice*? But certainly these people are *all* sinners. God knows they're sinners, and, if Scripture is true, *they* know they're sinners from the testimony of their own conscience (**Romans 1**). God needs no *more* evidence of their guilt, nor do they.

And what about Scriptures that attribute man's lostness *solely* to his own free chosen stubbornness and unbelief? See **Isaiah 65:12** - "I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter, because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in." Also, one must at least give some serious attention to Scriptures that relate the saving work of Christ, *not* to a sub-section of mankind, but to *all* mankind in the sincere intention of God - **1 John 2:1-2** - "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [2] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

Yet again, consider verses that so clearly teach God's *will for salvation* extending in such wide circumference so as to exclude no one - **2 Peter 3:9** - "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." Which will of God is this? Is it just a *wish*? Or are *all* automatically saved? Or does God exercise His will *in a different way* in terms of man's free responsive will in salvation? These questions need to be taken seriously.

I think a better solution is to think of *only one call rather than two*. God graciously extends His mercy to *every human being through Christ* - **1 Timothy 2:3-6** - "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."

It is God's sovereign decree that this call *becomes effectual when it is received in faith*. Thus, man's free decision doesn't *threaten* God's sovereignty, but *fulfills* it. In other words, all who hear have the same opportunity to respond. Some respond in *faith*. Some in *unbelief* - **Romans 11:22-23** - "Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. [23] And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again."

- 2) **THE MODEL ISRAEL PROVIDES FOR UNDERSTANDING TERMS DEALING WITH ELECTION, PREDESTINATION AND FOREKNOWLEDGE SHOW WE ARE PERHAPS BETTER UNDERSTANDING THESE TERMS IN A CORPORATE SENSE RATHER THAN AN INDIVIDUAL SENSE** - The nation of Israel is meant to serve as an example of how election works in the rest of the Scriptures, *including* the New Testament. We get this connection clearly in **Galatians 3:7-9**, etc.

- a) **Israel as a nation was chosen as an object of God's grace**. She did nothing to merit God's favour - **Deuteronomy 7:6-8** - "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. [7] It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, [8] but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." This was God's *purpose* in hardening Pharaoh's heart.

Notice, Pharaoh's heart was rebellious against God *before* God's hardening actions - **Exodus 5:2** - "But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go." God's *choosing* of Pharaoh was not the *initial* cause of his rejection of God. God's call neither saved nor dammed Pharaoh. The choosing of Pharaoh was to fulfill God's plan to magnify His Name through a miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt

(Exodus 7:3-5). God *used* Pharaoh's hard heart and *increased* it to accomplish His purpose. To my understanding, this is precisely Paul's theology of Israel in **Romans 11:1-27**. The same line of reasoning is spelled out with professing Christians in the last days in **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**.

- b) **The fact that they were CORPORATELY chosen as God's elect nation didn't keep some of them from missing God's saving purpose for their INDIVIDUAL lives.** See Paul's words in **Romans 9:30-32** - "What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; [31] but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. [32] Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith...." In other words, God's *corporate election* of the nation Israel didn't automatically accomplish *redemption* for each of these people individually. That was never what this election was all about. God's plan for salvation would never run along *ethnic* or *genealogical lines*. This is proven in **Romans 9:6-13**. God chose *Isaac*, not *Ismael*, though they were *both* descendants of Abraham. And God chose *Jacob* over *Esau*, though Esau was the older and, according to all Old Testament Jewish law, was the one *entitled* to the blessing. Paul is laboring to show that, as the rest of the New Testament will show, salvation isn't by race or the laws of lineage, but by the exercise of faith. **It's important to read Romans 9 through 11 in the proper context of the rest of the letter.** Who are the objectors Paul is dealing with? Most commonly Paul is pictured as dealing with the objections of the *non-elect* as they complain about those who are *chosen*. I believe it is more in keeping with the context of the whole letter to the Romans to see Paul dealing with the objections of *Jews* to God's choice of honoring the faith of the *Gentiles*. They are the same Jews who were complaining of God's way of salvation in **Romans 2:17-29**.
- c) **Those who NEVER WERE part of elect Israel weren't prevented from entering her blessings.** See the words of Ruth to Naomi in **Ruth 1:16** - "But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." In actual fact, *anyone* who so desired could *choose* to become one of God's elect in the Old Testament model and become a proselyte to the Jewish nation and faith. **Please notice** they were not elected *to be put* into Israel. Rather, they came to share in Israel's corporate "electness" by *choosing to accept the terms* and by *joining*. The *nation* was elect. The individuals *shared in* that corporate election as they entered that nation's covenant. **Here is the question.** Could Ishmael and Esau have been saved? If you say "yes," then you are admitting that their lack of being "*called*" or "*elect*" had nothing to do with the possibility of their salvation. This is my point.
- 3) **I BELIEVE THESE LESSONS ALL APPLY TO OUR ELECTION IN CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT** - Just as election extended to those who were in Israel, so *our election comes solely "in Christ"* - that is, *through our relationship to Him*. We are elect only as we are *in the Elect One* (note **Ephesians 1:3-4** - even here, *election* is not *selection*. We are elect *in Christ*. We are not elect *to be put into Christ*).
- 4) **ELECTION IS LINKED TO HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY** - One can only become elect in Christ through *a decision of faith*. Jesus Himself said the only barrier to man's salvation was his own *unbelief* - **John 3:16-18** - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."
- 5) **CHALLENGING TEXTS:** Matt. 22:1-14, Romans 8:29-30 (remembering 5:12-21, 11:21-22 and 8:18-25), Romans 9:19-25 (remembering the context of Jeremiah 18:1-12), John 10:26-30, John 6:44 (remembering John 12:32-33, John 3:14-17).