

OPENING THE HEART TO GOD'S GRACE (Call - continued)

Today we will consider how the call of God is *extended* and *received* into human hearts.

1) **THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD** - Though there are many different ways to approach this, we will consider *content*, *hearing* and *proclamation*:

- a) **The CONTENT of the Gospel** - The literal meaning of "gospel" is "good tidings or news." This is a foundational point to remember. *Only the Gospel brings salvation*. Religion in general has no ability to redeem. Jesus came into a world full of religions. Paul called people to "*turn from idols to serve the living God*." The offer of God's grace is made *very specifically in Jesus Christ*, and in Him alone - **1 Peter 2:4-7** - "*As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [6] For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'* [7] So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone....'"

See also **2 Thessalonians 2:14-15** - "*To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.*"

Notice also Peter's words in **Acts 4:12** - "*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*"

- b) **The HEARING of the Gospel** - People must hear and hear clearly if there is to be faith leading to salvation. Notice this emphasis particularly in Peter's preaching in **Acts 2:22-25** - "*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— [23] Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [24] God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. [25] For David says concerning him...."*

Indeed, this whole chapter is Peter's detailed *explanation* of the gospel, set into the Old Testament framework to fit the *hearing and understanding* of the people. Then see the people's response in **verses 36-37** - "*Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.*" [37] Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

It is not enough to be savingly effective that the gospel be *true*. It must be *proclaimed* as true and *heard* as true for faith to arise in the heart. Jesus stressed the same truth in **Matthew 13:18-19** - "*Hear then the parable of the sower: [19] When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.*" There is nothing wrong with this seed. It is nothing short of the truth of God's Word. But just because the seed reaches the heart doesn't guarantee germination. Hearing with understanding is everything! People can be *distracted*. They can be brilliant in other things but spiritually *dense*. They can hear *superficially*. And the latent fruit-bearing potential of the Word *will bring nothing to life in their lives*.

Notice also Paul's words to the Jewish leaders in **Acts 28:25-28** - "*And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: 'The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:[26]'Go to this people, and say, You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. [27] For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'*[28] Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

There is great danger in *repeatedly treating lightly God's revelation about His saving grace in Jesus Christ*. O, what responsibility we bear in sharing gospel truth! Carelessness here has greater consequences than careless brain surgery. Science has never demanded such care! Both proclaimers and hearers need honest and sincere words and hearts.

- c) **The PROCLAMATION of the Gospel** - **Romans 10:13-15** - "*For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'* [14] But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Paul sees this as a logical conclusion from all we've been saying. This is the mandate of the church and the heart of faithful missions. In short, it is our job to make sure people **hear** and **understand** the truth as actual **truth**. **Recipients** become **witnesses**. **All** must give testimony to Christ Jesus wherever we are. In both word and deed (no deeds alone can tell others about Jesus and His cross and resurrection) we point the world to the **call** and the **transformation** the gospel brings. Our **words** show the content and the invitation. Our **lives** show the transformation power of our message. **Both** are an essential part of truth telling.

Regarding **cross-cultural** missions, Paul says we either **go** or we **send**. **No third option is listed**. To receive is to reach out and give. As we have seen, this will take **two forms** in our lives: **First**, each one, as he lives his life, must share Christ. See **Philippians 2:15-16** - **"....that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, [16] holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain."**

Second, each one must be involved in **sending others** to go to regions and cultures he may never reach personally (**Romans 10:15**).

- 2) **THE APPLICATION OF TRUTH BY THE HOLY SPIRIT** - Man cannot generate saving life in himself nor in others. It is only the Holy Spirit who can bring **conviction** and **empower the Word** to bring saving life to the heart. Paul underlines these truths in **1 Thessalonians 1:4-6** - **"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit...."**

Here is a matter for much prayer in the Church. We are slow to learn that the saving of lost souls and the nurturing of those in Christ **doesn't hinge on the side of things we can produce or manipulate**. Spiritual life can't be mass produced or manipulated. God must originate. We must observe, obey, listen, sacrifice, and follow. We are **diligent** but never **self-sufficient**.

- 3) **THE RESPONSE OF FAITH** - The three essential elements of genuine faith are **knowledge**, **assent**, and **trust**. We will look at each in turn:

- a) **Knowledge** - Faith, on man's part, begins at the point of **understanding** the truth revealed about Jesus Christ. Paul makes this truth clear in **Romans 10:17** - **"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."** The truth about Jesus must be heard and understood before it can be acted upon in any deep way. It is vitally important that Christians don't downplay the importance of knowledge in the Christian faith. In most mystical forms of religion, as in the New Age movement, spirituality is based , **not on knowledge of historic, revealed, propositional truth**, but on an **inner state of tranquility and unity with Divine Presence**. The **revealed, propositional, factual base** of the Christian faith is what gives it its strength in a world full of false doctrine. True, knowledge alone will never bring the life of Christ to the heart. However, it is also true that faith will never rise higher than the understanding of the mind.
- b) **Assent** - Assent is saying "yes" to what is understood. It is the growing perception that the Gospel is for the one who will receive it personally. Knowledge **comprehends** the truth. **Assent** see the **need** for the truth. The doctrinal truth becomes a **matter of personal concern**. Knowledge become **acknowledgment**.
- c) **Trust** - See **1 Corinthians 15:1-2** - **"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, [2] and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain."** Faith **depends** on Christ for salvation and growth. It looks for no other solutions. A central component of Biblical faith is it **rejects other saving options**. It stands on no other ground.