

But when it pleased God

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[0 : 00] which we read, Galatians chapter 1, we shall read again verses 15 and 16. Galatians 1 verses 15 and 16.

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.

But when it pleased God. The church in Galatia was founded by the Apostle Paul on his first missionary journey.

When things are healthy, there's a wonderful relationship between a minister and his congregation. In chapter 4 and verse 14, we read that when the Apostle came amongst the Galatians, they received him as an angel from heaven.

[1 : 21] They gave him the best welcome possible. They listened intently to what he had to say, as if he were a messenger straight from God.

And of course, in a sense, he was a messenger from God. In verse 15 of chapter 4, he says that if it was possible, they would have plucked out their very eyes and given them to him.

What is more precious than your eyes? How we protect our eyes. If there's any danger, any fear, our hand goes up to our face, to our eyes, as that most vulnerable part of our body, so precious. All the things we can see. All the things we can see with our eyes. All that we can do because we can see. And yet they would have plucked out their very eyes and given them to the Apostle Paul, because they loved him so much and appreciated the great message of salvation which he brought to them.

Chapter 4 and verse 19, he says, My little children. That's the way Paul spoke of the Galatians, as if they were his little ones, his children, his precious ones.

[2 : 45] Sometimes a minister's relationship to his congregation is described as a marriage. And there are certainly some comparisons there.

The bond, the love, the relationship. But sadly, something came in to mar this marriage.

Some trouble came in amongst the Galatians. To cause problems. False teachers came amongst them. Who started to say, Not everything that Paul says is right.

You mustn't listen too much to that old man Paul. He's not accurate in what he says. He's not right in the gospel that he's preaching.

He's not telling you the whole truth. He doesn't know it all. And he began to say, You not only have to believe in Jesus, but you have to keep the law and the ceremonies.

[3 : 55] You've got to be circumcised. It's not enough to put your trust in Calvary's cross. People will not be saved simply by exercising faith in the Lord Jesus.

You also need to be circumcised and you need to keep the law and the commandments and the rules and the rituals and the ceremonies. So what the apostle says in chapter 1 verse 6, Right at the very beginning of his letter, Verses 1 to 5 for the words of greeting.

And then he gets stuck in right away to what he has to say to them. I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ and to another gospel.

Which is not another. It's not a true gospel. But it's a distortion. It's a heresy. It's a false religion. I marvel. I'm surprised.

It amazes me, says the apostle, Then I see how you have turned. You were so close. You were rejoicing in the gospel.

[5 : 15] You received me so well and you accepted my message and you loved me so much and you loved the truth that I was bringing to you. And now you have departed from all this so quickly.

And then the apostle Paul starts to tell how he came to have this gospel. You see, the false teachers, those who were leading the church in Galatia astray, they were arguing that Paul wasn't a genuine apostle.

He was somebody who came later. He didn't have the same authority. He couldn't be trusted in the same way. He had just learned his message from other people or came up with the ideas himself. And the apostle goes on to explain that although he wasn't one of the original twelve, yet he was called and appointed by God. And so he gives us in this chapter a little bit of his own testimony. And it's that testimony that I would like us to concentrate on today. There's important teaching in it for us. And as a preacher, my duty is to teach, to explain, to make known, to communicate the truth, and also to seek to apply that truth to your lives and to my own.

[6 : 53] But when it pleased God. The first thing that I want us to notice in this little bit of Paul's testimony is God's plan.

But when it pleased God. Those who argue against election and against the plan of God are to ignore lots and lots of verses of Scripture.

Right through the Scripture you have this teaching that God is sovereign, that he is in control, that he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

He has planned it all. Calvinism is not the invention of John Calvin in the 16th century. or even the invention of Augustine in the early church.

Calvinism is the teaching of Scripture from the beginning to the end. Indeed, God cannot be God unless he is in total control.

[8 : 03] and he cannot be in total control unless he foreordains whatsoever comes to pass.

God cannot know the future unless the future is fixed. Not even God can know what will happen tomorrow unless it is determined what is going to happen tomorrow.

How can God know what's going to happen tomorrow? If what is going to happen tomorrow depends on tomorrow and on people tomorrow and is not fixed beforehand.

It's got to be fixed before you can know the future. When it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb.

Some people might think that what the apostle is speaking about here is natural birth. That he was separated from his mother's womb.

[9 : 11] He was taken out of his mother's womb. And that the apostle is speaking here of God's providential care. Now that was certainly there.

And the apostle rejoiced in the fact that God looked after him from the point of his conception through his birth and every day of his life right up to the end.

But the idea that is here is not that God providentially looked after him at the point of his birth. The idea is rather that he was separated to a special task.

He was set apart. from his mother's womb. From birth. Yes, and even before his birth.

From conception. Once he had become an entity. We must remember that the human fetus is a person with whom God relates and has a soul.

[10 : 24] And right from his mother's womb, from the very point of his conception, Paul was separated, set apart, sanctified, in that sense, for a great ministry.

Indeed, from all eternity, the apostle was set apart by God. Remember in Romans 9, where he says, concerning Jacob and Esau, even before the children were born, and before they had done good and evil, it was said, the elder shall serve the younger.

Jacob have I loved, that Esau have I hated. Before they were born, before they had done good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand.

He has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens. Ephesians 1, verse 4, chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy.

Chosen to be holy. before the world was founded. Before creation. Before anything existed, but God alone.

[11 : 46] God, before the beginning was, chose a people for himself.

Chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy. Ephesians 1, verse 4. Paul was chosen to be holy, but he was also chosen to be an apostle.

Him that worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. Ephesians 1, verse 11.

According to the counsel, the determination, the plan, the idea that he had himself, the blueprint that he had drawn up.

him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. Let us remember, God has a plan. And in that plan, we all have a place, and a part, and a role, a position. that plan is not a barrier to our seeking the Lord. It shouldn't keep us from God, but rather should encourage us to seek the Lord, and to get to know him, and to put our trust in him who is so mighty, so sovereign, so powerful and great.

[13 : 17] And this great, powerful one says, seek me. And he doesn't say, seek me in vain. Those who seek him will not seek him in vain.

Those who seek him will find him. Yet, if we do seek him, we know who to thank. It's not ourselves, but him who put that desire in our hearts.

because the sad fact about men and women in the world, and experience should teach us that every day of our lives, the sad fact is, as the psalm puts it, there is none that seeketh after God. Look throughout the whole world, in every part of the world, and in every corner of society. Romans 3 says, quoting the psalm, there is none that seeketh after God.

What about the religions? Is that not a seeking after God? The Islamic religion, and the Hindu religion, the Buddhist religion, are they not seeking after God?

[14 : 31] No, they're not seeking after God, but what they are doing is distorting the knowledge of God, and departing from God, and seeking after anybody but the true God, and there is that tendency in man's nature to run away from God and to make a God for himself.

Instead of worshipping and serving the creator, they worship and serve the creature, the creature of their own imagination, and so the scripture says there is none that seeketh after God by nature. the only ones who seek after God are the ones into whose heart God has put that desire. Do you seek after God?

Do you have any desire to find God? Do you want to be saved? If you do, thank God for that desire. It's God who gave it to you, and you have there an encouragement, that from all eternity God has chosen you to be holy, and he has put that desire in your heart.

Seek him and find him. But remember this, if you have no desire in your heart after God, your situation is very, very dangerous.

[15 : 58] man by nature is dead in trespasses and sins, and the dead person seeks for nothing.

It's a very dangerous situation to be in, to be on the broad road to a lost eternity without God, without hope, and without a care.

So the first thing that I want us to notice from Paul's testimony here is that God had a plan for the Apostle Paul.

And if we are monstrous people, if we are Christians, we rejoice in God's plan for us. And whoever we are, we recognize that God has a plan that includes every man and woman in this world, and everything that he has created, it all is a place in God's plan.

Not one hair of your head falls to the ground without his notice, his interest, his plan. God's plan.

[17 : 20] The second thing is God's call. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace.

Jesus. Paul was born in Tarsus. And then he was educated in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the leading Jewish rabbis, or professors of theology.

He was a very enthusiastic type of man, with great intellectual gifts, and a very strong and determined will. He received the best education, he learned the Old Testament, and he studied in depth the Jewish traditions and the rabbinic teachings.

He was a very zealous Jew, an enthusiastic about his religion, very devout, very dedicated. In verse 13 he says, For you have heard of my conversation, the Old English word meaning lifestyle, you have heard of my lifestyle in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it.

and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

[19 : 14] Not only did he learn the traditions, but he was zealous and he was a persecutor. When the first Christian martyr, Stephen, was stoned to death, Saul was there, Saul of Tarshish.

He was involved. And after that he became more determined, arresting, imprisoning, beating up the Christians in Jerusalem and at last in his great zeal to eradicate the Christian church, to destroy from off the earth the followers of Jesus Christ, he had received authority from the chief priests and elders to go to Jerusalem and to imprison any who were of that way, of the Jewish way, of the of

Jesus way, the Christian way.

He was working out his own salvation and he thought that it pleased God for him to destroy Christians. But notice what happened.

That when it pleased God, these are great words, when it pleased God, in God's time, when God planned that it would happen, the hour came, the time for God to begin in a very special way in Paul's life.

It was planned from all eternity, but now it was fulfilled. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and set me apart to be a Christian and to be a preacher of his word, he called me by his grace.

[21 : 29] There was power in that call. You remember how they were walking along the road to Damascus, and it was about noon, the sun was at its brightest, when suddenly there was a light, far, far brighter than the sun, bright though the sun is in the Middle East.

There was a light far brighter than the sun, a glory shone down, and it was so bright that the apostle knew it was supernatural, it was frightening.

He fell on his knees, and he heard a voice, so, so, so, why persecute us thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Who art thou, Lord? I am Jesus, whom you persecute. Lord, what will you have me to do? go into Damascus, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. God's call. It was urgent, it was dramatic, it was decisive, it couldn't be ignored.

[22 : 56] It was a call that came with grace, called me by his grace. Grace is the unmerited favor of God.

It's undeserved. The effectual call is not deserved, it's not earned. But also, there's another idea in grace, the idea of sovereign grace, freely bestowed, coming from the great Lord, the call freely bestowed.

God's love. You've got to remember that God is calling people. He calls all men everywhere to repent.

He calls every one of you, calls the people of poetry, calls the people of sky, calls the people right across the world and every nation to repentance and to faith.

The general call of the gospel. And you've heard that call since childhood. You hear it Sunday after Sunday, year after year. But it's a call that you ignore until one day it becomes an effectual call.

[24 : 23] until one day he calls you by his grace with a powerful call, a call that can no longer be forgotten or ignored.

You have to face up to it. A call that comes with power and demands an answer and then there's a change.

Paul saw a light. He heard a voice and he saw a person. He saw Jesus in this resurrection body. That was very unusual. A Damascus road conversion. It's not the kind of conversion that everyone has. Indeed, it was unique.

to the apostle Paul. There's a sense in which every Christian's conversion is unique. That's why it's so interesting to hear people's testimonies.

[25 : 31] You see the special way in which God works in different people's lives. Everyone is different. God treats everyone in a different way.

Paul's conversion was special. Even though every conversion is different, there was something special about Paul's. He was, you see, being called to be an apostle.

And therefore he had to see the risen Lord. That was one of the essentials of apostleship, to see Jesus Christ in his resurrection body with his physical eyes.

the apostles. The apostles were witnesses of the resurrection. Nowadays, some people have very dramatic conversions.

Sometimes they see a light, or they hear a voice, or they see a dream, vision, or they get some fright.

[26 : 48] But these are the more unusual conversions. The more usual way is that God speaks to them through his word, through their conscience or their memory, through a sermon, or in some way brings the message of the gospel to bear upon their life.

and makes them realize the truth of the gospel, shakes them out of their complacency, awakens a sense of sin, and of guilt, and of wrath, God's wrath against them, and of their need to be converted, and opens their eyes to see Jesus Christ as the Savior, as the Messiah, so that they put

their faith and trust in him.

All our lives we're hearing the call of the gospel, but when it becomes an effectual call, it is successful, where in the past it was a failure.

There is power in the call, and people must respond to it. The dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and those that hear shall live, dead in trespasses and sins, but the voice penetrates, it reaches through the deaf ears, reaches into the heart of stone, and warms that stony heart, so that it begins to live, breath, and shakes that ear and forms it so that it can hear that ear that has been so deaf to God's word before, and opens these dull, cold, stony eyes, so that they begin by faith to see.

And that body which was just a heap of bones, that body spiritually is resurrected. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are resurrected to a newness of life, planted in Christ Jesus, a new plant, a new person, a new body.

[29 : 22] The old man is dead, and new man has arisen. The power of the effectual call, when it pleased God, planned from all eternity, the time comes when God calls, the appointed time.

Has that time come in your life? When it pleased God, has it pleased God to reveal his son in you? Has it pleased God to save your soul? Or are you still a spiritually lifeless corpse, a heap of dead bones, with a heart like stone?

a lump of stone, a lump of stone, when it comes to God? No love for him, no care for him, no faith in him, no joy in him, a heart of stone.

Are you still dead in trespasses and sins? When it pleased God? God, it's a wonderful thing when the time comes.

[30 : 50] Or that the time would be today for some of you. How often God speaks through a sermon, through the reading of the scriptures, when it pleased God.

Oh, that it would please God to open your ears today, to hear his voice, to hear his call, so that you would turn from your sins, just as the Apostle Paul was turned on the Damascus road, no longer carrying on on your sinful pathway, but stopping, changing direction, and going in the opposite way, when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace.

Oh, seek the Lord. Seek him for yourself. Seek him today, and you will find him. God's revelation, and you will find him.

And then thirdly, I would like you to see the revelation of God to reveal his son in me.

God's revelation has two parts to it. It involved, first, revealing the son to Paul, revealing Jesus to Paul.

[32 : 32] Previously, Paul thought Jesus as a heretic, a disturber of the peace, a destroyer of the Jewish nation, and of the traditions which he had received from the elders.

But now, he is convicted of his sin. He feels his guilt. He's afraid because he realizes that he has been fighting against God and destroying the followers of Jesus Christ.

He has been trying to keep the law, and yet he knows he has failed to keep the law. He feels the pangs of conscience. He feels a sense of need.

He feels ashamed in the presence of God. He tries hard. He is zealous, and yet he is a sinner. He is guilty. The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

The law shows us our sin and our guilt. We've got to come to Christ. He's the only answer. Unless we come to Christ, we will be condemned.

[33 : 39] To reveal his son in me, there's the apostle Paul in Damascus. The light has gone out of his eyes. He's blind.

He's fasting. He's praying. He's guilty. He's aware of his sin. He's crying for mercy. Days pass.

He's in great distress. He thought he was keeping the law, but he's convinced now that he has failed, and the law is condemning him as a sinner.

God sent along to Ananias. Brother Saul, receive your sight. Arise and be baptized, washing away your sins, in the name of Christ, in the blood of Jesus.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ, and confess him with your mouth, and you will be saved.

Has God revealed his son to you?

[34 : 53] Has he revealed to you your own wicked heart, and shown to you your own sinful life? Or are you blind to your faults? Has he opened your eyes to see the blessed Messiah, the Savior dying on the cross for your sins?

That's the first part of the revelation, revealing Jesus to Paul. The second part is revealing Jesus through Paul, to reveal his son in me, and to reveal his son through me.

Paul's life was changed, he was made new. He was saved, he was born again, and Paul's conversion was amazing, and people were saying, just think of it, this man who persecuted the church, this man who was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and now, look at him, he's preaching Jesus, he's associating with these Christians, he's turned his back upon the chief priests and the elders and the scribes and the important people of the Jewish nation, and he's joined with a rabble, with a mob, with the and educated with a fisherman of Galilee.

Paul, what's happened? I met Jesus, I met him on the Damascus road, Jesus changed my life, he gave me a whole new direction, he gives me a purpose which I never had before, peace in my heart, forgiveness for my sins, salvation, the hope of everlasting life, and a message for a lost world, to reveal his son in me that I might preach him among the heathen.

Immediately, Paul began, going out with that message of the gospel to a heathen world. Paul was a preacher and apostle.

[37 : 00] That was God's great plan for him, and he labored more abundantly than all the other apostles. It wasn't a man's gospel that he received, he got it directly from God.

Jesus met him and gave it to him, and that's why he's saying to the Galatians, no I or an angel from heaven, or any other man preach any other gospel to you, let him be accursed.

This gospel came straight from the mouth of God himself. Paul was called to be a preacher, but each of us are called to be witnesses.

maybe not a public preacher in the church, but we're all called to be preachers in our own lives, called to part with our sins, to trust in Christ, and to go out as fishers of men, to gather in others, as reapers in the harvest fields, with a message of the Son of God.

That's our message, to reveal his Son, to preach Christ, to tell people, of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, who died on the cross 2,000 years ago, rose again the third day, today is on the throne in heaven, and very soon will be coming again to judge the world, who is mighty to save, who can save even unto the uttermost those who come unto God by him.

[38 : 41] Are you a preacher? are you a reaper in the harvest fields? Are you a fisher of men?

They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars in heaven, forever and ever. He that winneth souls is wise.

have we listened to the call? Has God's time come in our lives? Are we now living as those who have responded to the effectual call, showing forth Christ in our daily lives?

Let us pray. Lord, we pray that our lives would speak of Christ and what he has done for us.

That people would see the change, that they would contrast us with themselves, that we would be holy.

[40 : 01] For does it not say in my word, chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy.

Help us, Lord, to be holy and to live godly lives and grant to you that with our words, not just with our lives, but with our words, we would commend Christ to others and that they would come to appreciate the Savior because of us.

Lord, work in our lives, in the lives of each one of us here, and in the lives of the many in our community who need thee.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen.