

Lesson Two

(1:1-7)

AN UNIQUE SALUTATION

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, 2 which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations for his name's sake; 6 among whom are ye also, called to be Jesus Christ's: 7 to all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wherein does the uniqueness of this salutation lie? It is the longest of all Pauline salutations and is fitting for the length and formal character of the epistle. Normally three basic elements comprise the total content of a salutation: author, destination, and a greeting. Verses one and seven, if read together, would fulfill all requirements of a normal salutation. Between those verses Paul introduces much of the content

which he intends to include in the epistle. The salutation serves as an introduction both to the apostle Paul and to his message.

SERVANT AND APOSTLE

Paul introduces himself as a "servant of Jesus Christ." It is not likely that Paul intended the word "servant" to be understood in the authoritative sense in which it is used in the Old Testament (classic example of authoritative usage, Jeremiah 7:25). Rather, Paul expresses humility and establishes rapport with his personally unknown readers by referring to himself as a servant. Paul writes similarly to John who could have referred to himself as an apostle but preferred to humbly designate himself as "your brother" (Revelation 1:9). If the word servant was meant to express authority, it would have been redundant because Paul immediately referred to himself as an Apostle which without question connotes office and its attached authority.

There were many qualifications for one to hold the office of an apostle. Irrespective of what other essential may be cited, the pivotal qualification of an apostle is to be called. Although the saying, "many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14) has nothing to do with the choice of apostles, the principle expressed is similar. It is true that many might be qualified to fill the office of an apostle but would not be called to do so. Jesus made it clear to the twelve, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). In its widest meaning the word apostle may be defined as "one who is sent." In this general usage of the word, many people in the New Testament are called apostles. Frequently Epaphroditus is missed when citation is made of those who are not among the Twelve but are called apostles. English translations of Philippians 2:25 call Epaphroditus a "messenger" of the church at Philippi. The Greek, however, clearly calls him an (*apostolon*) apostle. It is my opinion that it is an error to allow that Junias and Andronicus are called apostles, even in the widest latitude of meaning allowable in the word apostle. In reference to these two Christians at Rome, Paul says that they were "of note among the apostles" (16:7), which probably means that the apostles knew them well and had taken note of their effective service for Christ and the church. But the suggestion that Junias and Andronicus are classed with the apostles, even in the most general sense of the word, is highly suspect.

The reason for Paul's call to apostolic authority and mission was that he should be separated unto the Gospel. Paul believed that the act of separation by God had occurred at his birth as stated in Galatians 1:15, "God separated me from my mother's womb." To understand this

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saying as having reference simply to physical birth would mean little as everyone could say in that literal sense that he was separated from his mother's womb. Some spiritual implication must be involved in his statement. Paul was probably like a Fritz Kreisler and many other artists or geniuses who indicate that from their earliest youth they had an awareness of some unique quality in their lives. Fritz Kreisler, the great violinist, said that he knew musical notes and chords instinctively before he knew anything about the abc's. Such an instinctive ability is illustrated by the little girl who disturbed her older sisters greatly because they took piano lessons, and struggled to learn to play simple songs. The little sister would listen to the older sisters practice, and when they finished, she would sit down at the piano and play by ear the melodies the sisters were laboriously picking out note by note. I suppose that it was some awareness in childhood that Paul had of his mission in life when he observed that God had some extraordinary influence upon him at birth. Certainly the unique supernatural experience with Jesus on the Damascus road would have come to Paul's mind when he wrote of being separated unto the things of God.

SEPARATED UNTO THE GOSPEL

The conversion which began when the Lord appeared in a light above the brightness of the noonday sun separated this persecutor of Christians unto the Gospel in a miraculous way. The separation process continued in the further act of setting Paul apart by a divine directive to the church at Antioch when the Holy Spirit said, "Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul." This decree was a prelude to the first missionary tour when Christ's servants, set apart by divine orders, went to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2).

Finally, as a contributing influence to the process of Paul's separation, may I add, the subjective factor of the singleness of mind seen in the statement of the apostle Paul which reflects his determination and discipline, "one thing I do" (Philippians 3:13). The "one thing" was to serve Jesus Christ and press on to fulfill that purpose for which he was called. Everything else was extraneous to the goal of the apostle Paul. It was that kind of singleness of purpose which drove Paul to preach the gospel fully "from Jerusalem, and round about even unto Illyricum" (15:19). With no more virgin territory "in these regions" in which to preach the Gospel, Paul wanted to journey to Rome and on west to Spain (15:23, 24). He must have been keenly aware of the principle of the disciplined life illustrated in the little seed parables of Matthew 6:22-24. Jesus told of the single eye and how one can serve but one

master. You cannot serve two authorities at once, and neither can you have your eyes on heaven and earth at the same time. Singleness of mind and purpose is essential to discipleship. Before Paul became a Christian, he wore a name which means "separated." Paul was a Pharisee and the name of the Jewish sect came from the Hebrew word *parash* which means "to cleave, to separate, to distinguish." Pharisees, by name, were separated ones. Thus, Paul knew long before he became a Christian what it meant to be a separated, dedicated person. As a Pharisee, he was a good one. He said to the leaders of his day that he was "A Pharisee and a son of Pharisees" (Acts 23:6). It may be that Paul came from a long line of Pharisees. Perhaps his ancestors were Pharisees from the time that Phariseeism was founded about one hundred and fifty years before Christ. At any rate, Paul knew what it was to be a separated one and brought to the service of Christ that level of devotion which made him a leader among the Jews.

THE GOSPEL OF GOD

Paul was separated unto the Gospel of God and he was set for the proclamation of good news about salvation which God had promised through the prophets. The Gospel is properly designated to be "of God" because of its origin. It came from God and was proclaimed by Jesus Christ. This idea that the Gospel is of divine origin, came from God, was planned by Him, and was predicted through the prophets, is recurrent in the book of Romans. That truth is stated clearly here in the introduction, and when Paul comes to the closing doxology of his letter, he returns to that theme again. "Now to him that is able to establish you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith" (16:25-27). It was through the Scriptures which Paul calls the "oracles of God" (3:2) that the Gospel was promised. God's plan of redemption was seen limitedly in "bird's eye" views as the prophets wrote predictively, and Paul is fulfilling God's plan by revealing fully what the prophets only revealed in part. Notice the word *musterion* in 16:25 — which is translated "mystery" in English. It is a key word of the vocabulary of the apostle Paul. He uses "mystery" frequently in Ephesians, Colossians, and in the Corinthian letters as well to refer to the good news of the Gospel in general, or to some specific phase of the Gospel plan such as the Jews and Gentiles being united in one body (Ephesians 3:1-6). Coupled with the word "mystery," there

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is regularly the thought of "revelation" indicating that the mystery has been unveiled and the secret revealed. The Gospel was a secret in ages past when the Good News was not fully made known. It was predicted and foreshadowed but was not made known until "now." The "now" concept is typical of Paul also. The "now" of 16:26 has reference to the entire Christian dispensation, not just to the day in which Paul was preaching. It is a reference to God's timetable in which the Patriarchal dispensation came first, then the Mosaic dispensation, and "now" the Christian dispensation. The Christian era is called synonymously "the last days" (Acts 2:16, 17; Hebrews 1:2), "last hour" (1 John 2:18), and "end of the time" (1 Peter 1:20). If one understands such synonymous usages of terms in the Scriptures, it may help him to avoid the pitfalls of wild, speculative teaching about the "last days" such as that heard via the radio so frequently. Fanciful interpretations of prophecies concerning the end of time are sent over the airwaves regularly and many times the passages quoted have reference to the whole Christian dispensation and not just to a time period immediately preceding the return of our Lord. The "end of the times" of 1 Peter 1:26 begins when Christ came to Bethlehem's manger. That is the point of time when God introduced through His Son His last dealings with men that have to do with salvation. No other Savior will ever be born, and neither will there be another plan for saving man. No other Good News will ever be announced. The gospel is God's last revelation to man. Hebrews 1:1, 2 shows the finality of God's approach to humanity through His Son. When a teenager, I saw a banner on a large church building located in the heart of Minneapolis. The banner, four to six feet wide and running the full length of that edifice announced in big letters "BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON NOW BEING FOUGHT." Of course, we wouldn't be here now to write or read about it if the banner's announcement had been true. But one can avoid some such erroneous concepts by an understanding of the "now" of Paul, as being synonymous with the Christian dispensation and as being contrasted with that which was done through the law and the prophets. What Paul is saying, then, is that the Gospel is no innovation. This isn't the product of some Johnny-come-lately with a new scheme that has just come out of the mind of men. This isn't a program someone has lately dreamed up. It was indeed the plan of God as predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures. So, as Grubbs says, "The Gospel is not a novelty of human imagination." Denny observes that "the Gospel is not in principle a new thing, a subversion of the true religion as it has hitherto been known to the people of God." On the contrary, God promised it before through His prophets and their predictions are recorded in the Holy Scriptures. It was a universally applicable message for "all the nations" (v. 5).

PROMISED THROUGH HIS PROPHETS

"Prophets," in this instance is probably not intended to be restricted to those who were officially prophets. The word prophets, like the word apostle, is used in the New Testament in a generic sense, as well as in a specific or official sense. There are persons referred to in Scriptures as prophets who did not hold the office of a prophet. David is a good example. Did David prophesy? He certainly did, and his numerous prophecies are so well known they need not be cited here. Is he called a prophet in Scripture (Acts 2:30)? But did David fill the office of prophet? It is interesting to note that the Hebrews, in their early division of the Scripture, put the book of Daniel with Esther, Nehemiah, and other books of history and not with the books of the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. What was Daniel's office? Basically he may be classified as a statesman and counselor to the King. He was a man in authority among the Medes and Persians just like Joseph was second to Pharaoh in authority among the Egyptians. Moses said, "A prophet shall God raise up . . . like unto me" (Acts 7:37). Deuteronomy 34:10 states that there was never another prophet like Moses in Israel. But was Moses officially a prophet? He was a lawgiver, and Numbers 12:6-8 informs us of a difference in the mode of revealing Himself to Moses from the way He made His word known to the prophets. The school of the prophets began under the direction of Samuel. Although there were those of early Biblical history like Abraham (Genesis 20:7), Moses and others who prophesied limitedly (Numbers 11:25), it is not usually thought that the office of the prophet came into being until the time of Samuel.

So there is a sense in which people function as prophets, teaching and speaking prophetically, but who do not fill the office of a prophet. I think that's true of the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). Simeon prophesied (Luke 2:34 ff.) as did many others but there is no certainty that every one who prophesied held authoritatively the office of a prophet. It is my opinion that "promised through the prophets" is a general statement which speaks of all the "mouthpieces" who represented God, spoke His will, and revealed His scheme of redemption.

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

I Corinthians 15:1-4 provides a good example of Paul's view of the Gospel as being predicted in the Old Testament writings. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

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It is clear that Paul recognized a certain body of writings as authoritative and true. The claim that there wasn't an Old Testament canon at least until A.D. 90, when at the council of Jamnia the Jews determined what was canonical and what was not, is untenable. In *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus speaks of the Jewish canon of Scripture and notes the divisions of the books of the canon. Previous to Josephus persons like Jesus and Paul spoke of a definitive body of writing which they designated with such descriptive nomenclature as "the law and the prophets," the "holy Scriptures," and the "oracles of God." With these terms they referred to a distinctive assemblage of writings which was well defined and well known in their day. In the tenth chapter of Romans Paul argues strenuously on the basis of the content of the Old Testament that God was accomplishing in history just exactly what He said He would do with the Jews and with the Gentiles. Paul cites eleven Old Testament passages in Chapter Ten. Apostolic preaching from Pentecost and forward gives good example of the use of the Old Testament. Christ set the precedent by frequently quoting the Old Testament Scriptures. The apostles, in imitation of their Lord, did the same thing as they preached the Gospel. Tyndale in his prologue to the *Commentary on Romans* makes the astounding statement that "Romans is an introduction to the whole Old Testament."

GOD'S SON

Paul is called unto the Gospel of God in which His Son is involved. The promises that God will save man from his sin are given through the prophets and are recorded in the Holy Scriptures. All of those promises relate to God's Son. Everything centers in Him. So central is He that Paul could later write, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). God's Son "according to the flesh" is of "the seed of David." Both Matthew and Luke give genealogies. They are important and are recorded with the specific intent of showing clearly that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament predictions concerning His lineage. The word "flesh" in this particular passage means "mankind" or "the ways of man." He was born of the seed of David after the way children are born and according to the way men keep genealogies and biographical records. Paul makes the same claim about the human origin and lineage of Jesus in the sermon delivered at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:22, 23). "Flesh" has reference to His human nature as distinct from His divine nature. Jesus is not just (*anthropos*) man. Neither is He only God. Rather, he is the (*theanthropos*) the God-man. So what we are saying is that Paul does not intend the word "flesh"

to be a distinction between Christ's personal body and His personal spirit, but it is a contrast between His human nature and His divine nature. He is the Son of God, born of a woman. The word "born," when used of Jesus, should never be understood to denote the beginning of His existence. Instead, it points to His entrance into the stream of human history. Many passages of Scripture indicate the pre-existence as well as eternity of Jesus. The author of Hebrews wrote, "A body didst thou prepare for me" (10:5). As Alexander Campbell pointed out in *The Christian System* (p. 9), the "me" was before the "body" (Cf. Colossians 1:15-19; Philippians 2:5-11). Romans 8:3 informs us that God sent His Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh" but He existed before He was sent and appeared among men as the Son of God. Verse four says that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God who possessed power, or the same words may be understood to say that Jesus was powerfully declared to be the Son of God. There was no problem in determining His human nature. He appeared like all other men who walked the pathways of Palestine. He wore Palestinian garb, ate and drank normally, loved, cried, and laughed. Some may think one to be irreverent who suggests that Jesus was human enough to have possessed a sense of humor. Elton Trueblood wrote the volume entitled *The Humor of Jesus*. Perhaps some of his suggestions about humor in Jesus' teaching are a bit strained, but who could deny a twinkle in the eye of our Lord as He talked about swallowing a camel. One of the finest professors under whom I had the privilege to study was George Mark Elliott. He would introduce the keenest of humor into a lecture without a hint of anything humorous to come except the tell-tale twinkle in his eye. His lectures, though deep and meaningful, were punctuated with delightful touches of humor. Jesus must have taught like that. He was a total man and his humanity was easily identifiable.

How could the deity of Jesus be clearly marked out? Paul mentions two ways in which the divine aspect of His nature was made known. The first identifying factor was the spirit of holiness. This may be a typical Hebrew (genitival) expression meaning the Holy Spirit. It is more likely that the American Standard Version has it correct in referring to the personal spirit of holiness of Jesus which was constantly evident. Pilate was not the only one who could find no fault in Him. His perfection could not be hidden. When His life, characterized by holiness, came to an end, God gave the climactic evidence of His deity when He was raised from the dead. The apostles regularly appealed to the resurrection as proof of the true identity of Jesus (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33, 34, 37; 17:30, 31).

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READER'S REVIEW:

1. What is the meaning of the word "servant" in 1:1?
2. Give definitions which indicate the various ways in which the word "apostle" is used in the New Testament.
3. What is the pivotal qualification for being an apostle?
4. State the basic purpose for Paul being "called" and "separated."
5. Cite various autobiographical experiences that may have come to the mind of Paul when he wrote the word "separated."
6. What subjective influence is cited as contributing to Paul's "separated" life?
7. Define the word "mystery" as used by Paul and indicate the companion word which appears frequently with the word "mystery."
8. In what sense is it proper to say that the Gospel is the Gospel of God?
9. What is the chronological involvement of the word "now" as used in 16:26 and how does this involvement relate to the content of the salutation?
10. Define the word "prophet" and give examples of variant usages of the word in the Scriptures.
11. What is the observation concerning Romans by Tyndale which the author labels as "astounding"? Why is the observation so striking?
12. How are the words "flesh" and "spirit" used in the salutation?
13. What are the two lines of testimony cited by Paul to prove that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God?
14. In what way is the universal character of the Gospel introduced in the salutation?