

God'S Calling And Election

Changing of the Heart

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People the world over are fascinated by lotteries. Many nations, many states—and even other institutions for various reasons—run lotteries. Most of them will publicize the lottery with an altruistic motive for public consumption, and that is usually something having to do with education or something everybody thinks is a pretty good thing for money to go toward. But underlying that there is usually a greedy motive and that is, simply, they want to fill the coffers of whatever institution it is, or state, or government, as full as they can with the people's money and they do not care who that money comes from.

But people willingly go along. As a matter of fact, when these things come before the vote, oftentimes they are voted in; people want to have this chance at some big money. People like to play the lottery because it offers them the chance of very high return—sometimes into the hundreds of millions of dollars—at a very low risk. So they can put up just a few bucks—ten, twenty, thirty, forty bucks, however much they are willing to give to this game—and they have a chance. They have a little bit of a chance to win the big prize like March's \$640 million (or something ridiculous like that that was given in that big Mega Millions lottery), and if they do not win, well that is okay too. They have not put out a whole lot of money, and 'no harm, no foul' is the way they look at it.

Of course, you know that the people who get hurt most by lotteries are the poor people who spend a lot more money, proportionately, on these lotteries, and some people end up not only poor but absolutely destitute from playing the lottery.

Now the odds of winning a lottery, especially one of the big ones—Powerball, or the Mega Millions lotteries—is usually infinitesimal. The Mega Millions lottery in March, which I mentioned before, had a jackpot somewhere in the half-a-billion dollar range. It had a one-in-176 million chance of winning! So, that is like, you had 'one in half the population of the United States' chance of winning this lottery. As one source that I saw put it, which is just a little worse—at one in 112 million—than dying at the "hands" of a vending machine. But actually, did you know that two people a year die via being crushed a vending machine? Now they were probably up there trying to shake it and over they go. Famous last words: "Give me my change back."

Anyway, it is far more likely that a person driving to the store to buy a lottery ticket will die in an automobile accident on the way; the odds of doing that—dying in an

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automobile accident—are only one in 6700. So you have a much better chance of dying in auto accident than winning the lottery.

Even if they do score big, even if they do make that one-in-176 million dollar opportunity, lottery winners—especially the ones who win big—do not have a very good track record of happiness and contentment with their lotto success. Most of them have very poor track records; in fact, their good fortune seems to desert them once they win the lottery.

Sometimes it looks like they never had any good luck and winning the lottery was bad luck. Some of the time there are legal battles over the ownership of the original ticket, and that is especially likely to occur when a group of people (it does not matter if it is a group of coworkers or a family) agrees beforehand to share the winnings. You have got to think about this. If you are dealing with half a billion dollars split among a dozen, fifteen, twenty people who get together to buy these tickets, most people are willing to do nearly anything to get their greedy little hands on that amount of money. And if they get double their share or triple their share by knocking a few people out of the running for it, they will do it—you know they will. It is a really sad undertaking to do a bit of research on lottery winners because the tales are just so unfortunate. There are so many of them that end badly.

The 'Atlantic Wire', which is the online blog site of *The Atlantic* magazine (so it has some pretty good credentials), published a piece by a lady named Jen Doll on March 30, 2012 (so this was just about the time of the Mega Millions jackpot) and she titled her article "A Treasury of Terribly Sad Stories of Lotto Winners." I would like to read you two of these stories just to give you a little bit of an idea of how sad these lives of lottery winners can be.

Jack Whittaker [no relation to Charles, by the way] of West Virginia was an already wealthy businessman when he won what was at the time the largest jackpot ever by a single ticket, garnering him \$314.9 million on December 25, 2002 [that was quite the Christmas present]. A chain of awful events followed, including his car being broken into twice, the first time with \$545,000 in cash stolen [and by the way, the car was outside of a strip club which he was attending], then later with \$200,000 stolen [but this was later recovered]; a plot was revealed in which two club employees [and I am assuming it is the same strip club that he was at, that he frequented] had planned to drug his drinks and rob him [but fortunately they were caught]; his granddaughter's boyfriend was found dead in Whittaker's home from an overdose; Whittaker's granddaughter [same 'granddaughter'] was found

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dead at a male friend's house after being reported missing [and that death was ruled an overdose]; Whittaker [himself] had a DUI; Whittaker was sued by Caesars Atlantic City casino for bouncing \$1.5 million worth in checks to cover gambling losses; Whittaker was sued by a woman who had previously sued him for not paying her money [and he claimed thieves had stolen it from him]; and Whittaker's daughter [this is the most tragic thing] was found dead. [And he said] "I wish I'd torn that ticket up."

Here is the second story:

In June of 1997, a man named Billie Bob Harrell Jr. [he was a former Pentecostal preacher] took the \$31 million Texas Lottery jackpot. At first, all was great: Harrell purchased a ranch. He bought a half-dozen homes for himself and other family members. He, his wife and all the kids got new automobiles. He made large contributions to his church. If members of the congregation needed help, Billie Bob was there with cash," writes Steve McVicker in *The Houston Press*. Then suddenly Harrell discovered that his life was unraveling almost as quickly as it had come together. . . . everyone, it seemed—family, friends, fellow worshipers and strangers—was putting the touch on him [meaning, they were all asking him for money]. His spending and his lending spiraled out of control. In February [and I think February of either 1998 or maybe it was a little bit later] those tensions splintered his already strained marriage. And tragically, 20 months after winning the lottery, Harrell committed suicide.

I imagine that when these men and other lottery winners won their millions, they felt really special. They felt 'blessed.' They were that one in a million or one in 176 million. They felt on top of the world. By this win, by this lucky break they had been lifted up from the rest of humanity and marked as special people—as fortunate, as wealthy and privileged.

But over time, through a host of poor choices, they let it all go to waste. Their lives ended up worse than before their lucky wins. And then, as a matter of fact, several of them (not just the ones I have read), said winning the lottery was the worst thing that had ever happened to them.

Though it is a crude analogy, those of us who are God's elect have won the greatest lottery of all. Of course, we know that chance had nothing at all, nothing whatsoever to

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do with our calling and election by God. It was entirely His sovereign choice, as we are going to see. But it is worthwhile to remember every so often what a unique opportunity we have been given and that we need to, in realizing this, resolve once again not to squander what we have been given in a downward spiral of poor choices.

So today we are going to review the subject of God's calling and election. This is going to be a rather basic sermon, but I think it is necessary that we go over these things every once in a while and really get a taste of what has been given to us.

First, let us put to rest any lingering idea that our calling contains any element of chance. So let us go to probably THE most famous scripture on this subject, which is John 6:44. Jesus is speaking to the Jews there after feeding the five thousand and walking on the sea. This, of course, is right around the Days of Unleavened Bread and He is talking about the true manna and all of that. This is all in that same context. He [Jesus] says:

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Now this was such an important point that He was trying to get across that He repeats it again in verse 65.

John 6:65 And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

So He is very clear here that no one can come to Him unless the Father does something to draw them to Him. Let us go on and read another very well-known scripture in I Corinthians 1. We come to these scriptures frequently. But I want to establish here a few foundational rules of God's calling. Paul writes to these Corinthians. He says:

I Corinthians 1:26-31 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you

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are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

Paul makes it very clear here that God has chosen and that he says again (verse 30) “of Him you are in Christ Jesus.” So he continues to press this point that God has chosen. Then his other point of course is that God has chosen not the great people of this world but the lesser, and it is all for God’s glory.

Finally, let us go to II Timothy 1.

II Timothy 1:8 “Therefore [he writes] do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God . . .

I used verse 8 only to get the last word because I wanted you to understand that we are talking about God here because He is the subject of verse 9.

II Timothy 1:9 . . . who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

This is a good summary scripture for a lot of the ideas that fall into place under the subject of ‘God’s calling.’ I think these verses are very clear and they really do not need much comment, but I do want to call attention to the main points in these three passages.

1. It is impossible to become a Christian by oneself or by one’s own actions. It was very clear in John 6, also in I Corinthians 1, and also in II Timothy 1 that God does the calling and no one can come to Christ unless he is called. One does not seek God and find the truth; that is backwards, it does not work that way. What actually happens is that He seeks us and gives grace. He offers us the truth. He is the one that takes the initiative, it is not us. So if anybody says that they were seeking the truth and found the truth and they became a Christian, it is a lie; it is not the way it happens. Always God is the one who initiates the relationship. So one cannot become a Christian by one’s own actions.

2. The second is very similar to it and I have been saying it all along here. The second point is that God the Father does the calling. Just a slight difference in the point here, but it is God the Father who does the calling and I emphasize 'the Father.' He draws the person to the Son. So it is the Father who does the initiating of the relationship. He is the one who sets everything in motion to lead a person to the truth of Christ and to His way of life.

So what we see here is that the calling of God is a personal, intimate action on His part. It is condescension, if you will, of the mighty God to an insignificant human. He deigns, as it were, to reach down from His high and lofty position and have a relationship with someone who is a worm by comparison. Thus David says, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" It is a mindboggling thought that the great and almighty God of the universe would want a relationship with someone like us, someone who is corrupt, someone who is going to fade away, someone who is going to die.

But He wants that relationship so that we ultimately will not die and that we will not be corrupt because when we are changed, those are the things that go away; we are no longer corruptible and we live forever; and of course, we can have a relationship forever. But the main point to take away from all of this is that the Father, the great God of this universe, does the calling. He knows the people He is calling Himself. He has been watching them; He has foreknown them, as we will see in a minute; and He chooses that person individually.

3. The point that Paul made in I Corinthians, the first chapter: God generally calls ordinary people. Usually they are in the middle of society, sometimes they are at the lowest part of the society, and infrequently they are on the high part of society. There have only been very few that I know of in history that have actually been from the great, as it were. Most of the time it is ordinary people. He raises them up so that it is very clear, as Paul says, to anyone looking at what has happened that the Father is the one to receive all the credit and praise for the creation of that great thing that He is looking to do, that is, to create glorious children for Himself from the dust of the ground. Just as He did with Adam (He raised up a human being from the dust of the ground), He is doing the same thing in creating spiritual children from the dust of the ground, and He gets all the credit because we are just ordinary Joes and Janes. So when, in the Kingdom, people see those ordinary people in their glory, they will say, "Wow, if God can do it to them, what could He do with me?" And that is what God wants to see.

4. Paul shows in all of these that we did nothing to deserve the calling. It was completely due to God's grace and His sovereign choice as part of His plan and purpose. That was mentioned in II Timothy 1 where it was part of His purpose to call us, and He stooped down and He called us by His grace. It even says here in verse 9 that He has been working on this purpose and extending this grace from before time began. He has been working on this project for a long time and He is putting in the parts that He needs to do to complete His entire plan. So He is calling us to fill the body of Christ, as it were, to erect the temple that He wants to see erected. All this is going according to plan and to start with, we have nothing to do with it. There is no way that we can say, "Hey, hey, choose me! I'm a good brick." It just does not work that way. We had no qualities that would put us into that position on our own, but He chose us out of this world and made us able to do the responsibilities that He is giving us. So we did nothing to deserve our calling. That is the point. He has been working on this for a very long time and He has chosen us by His own free will to do it.

Now that we have got those basic points down, we can go on. What I want to do now is go back to Matthew 20 because there is some confusion that has arisen about the way Jesus uses the word 'call' and the way Paul and the other apostles used the word 'call,' or any of its different forms. So what we are going to do here, the passages that we are going to be looking into are two parables, but we are not going to go into the parables because that would just take too long. All I want is the summary statement that Christ makes at the end of each so that we can see what He was driving at.

Matthew 20:16 So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.

That is the one we are looking at here: "For many are called, but few chosen." He also says the same thing in Matthew 22:14. This is at the end of the Parable of the Wedding Feast and He says: "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Like I said, people can be confused by this use of the language since if you go to other parts of the New Testament, especially Paul's epistles, the use of the word 'called' or 'calling' or 'call' refers to God's elect. But Jesus does not seem to use it that way here; He seems to use it as those that are *invited*. He makes the difference as 'called' versus 'chosen' whereas when Paul uses it, he seems to use 'called' in place of 'chosen.' Paul uses 'called' as a synonym for the elect, or the chosen, or the saints. There seems to be a little bit of difference between the way Jesus approaches it and the way Paul

approaches it later. So I want to help you to understand what is going on here and why there seems to be a little bit of a contradiction or a little bit of confusion over these two concepts.

In the New Testament, the words 'call,' 'called,' or 'calling' are used in two similar but distinct theological ways and if we fail to make the distinction, we can become tripped-up a little bit and this is what has happened in the Protestant world especially. They think that everybody has been called and has an opportunity for salvation now, and that is not the way Jesus is using the term in Matthew.

The first of these two theological ways is how Christ uses it here in the Gospels, and especially in these two places in Matthew. His use of the word 'call' suggests a general invitation or summons to draw near and to hear God's truth. It is a very important word—to 'hear' God's truth. So it is a general invitation or summons to draw near and hear God's truth.

Now in these parables and in other parables that Jesus gave, it is likened to various things like calling laborers to work in the field, meaning, they would have to come close to the owner of the land and he would pay them and all that; they would work for him. In other places it is like a sower casting seeds broadly across the ground. That is an image of calling that he is spreading something just widely and broadly around for people to take up, as it were. In this particular parable here in chapter 22, it is calling guests to a wedding; he is inviting them to a central place for an occasion. That is how Jesus uses it primarily in the Gospels as a 'general' (that is an important word too) invitation or summons to draw near and to hear God's truth. So the important element here is 'general and broad.' It is available to the many.

In our own way today we can liken it to a broadcast of a message on the radio or on television. It goes out almost indiscriminately. I know they can be aimed and such, but in this case we are talking about a broadband broadcast. It is out there for many to understand, to many to listen to. So, in fact, when the church preaches through print and radio and television or on the Internet, this kind of calling like Jesus was talking about here in the Gospels is available to thousands of people or even to millions of people. It is out there for people to read, to hear, and so they can stumble across the truth. It is out there for people to pick up. And one could go so far as to say that the availability of the Bible in so many languages in just about every hotel room in the world, thanks to the Gideons, is a calling of this sort—that the truth, as Fox Mulder [of The X-Files] would say, is out there. It is there for people to understand if they want.

Remember Romans the first chapter, where it says "the invisible attributes of God are

clearly seen by the things that He has made”? In a way, that is a kind of calling too because Paul there says that people are without excuse in terms of coming to a bit of an understanding and knowledge of God. So it is a widely broadcast invitation to hear the truth. I am making sure you understand that it is just to taste the truth, because it is not the same as ‘the calling’ that Paul is talking about or what Jesus is talking about in using the term ‘chosen.’ That is entirely different.

So God has not hidden the truth under a bushel. Did He not say we are not to hide our light under a bushel? Well, He practices what He preaches. He does not hide the truth under a bushel either. He puts it out there plainly for people to see. It is in His creation; His Word is out there; His people are promoting it all the time and preaching it. It is out there for people to take up if they run across it. So we could say He has set it in plain sight and everyone is invited to learn it.

But, as Jesus says here so plainly, the Father chooses only a few to understand it and to have a relationship with Him and His Son; that is the difference. Jesus makes it clear here that though the broadcast of the truth is very general and many people have access to it, the Father chooses only a few to really get it. He said that He has a little flock, does He not? (Luke 12:32 where He says “Fear not little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”) Well, that is kind of what He means here. There are only a few, a little flock—just a small bit of humanity—that He has extended the opportunity to really understand the truth and to come into a relationship with Him. We know that the church is going to remain small because He has limited it severely to the firstfruits at this time. So that is the first use of ‘call’ and it is mostly in the Gospels, that it is a very wide and general transmission of the truth.

The one that we are most familiar with though is the one that Paul uses—the second theological usage. As I mentioned before, it is related more to how Christ uses ‘chosen’ in these verses. So by the time we get to the apostle Paul, ‘called’ refers to God’s elect. In his epistles, he says we are ‘the called by God’ or he calls us ‘the called’ or he calls us ‘the elect’ or he calls us ‘the chosen’ or he calls us ‘saints’ which are the separated ones—the ones who have been called out and set apart and made holy.

So all these terms essentially mean the same thing, that God has separated some—a very few—to know Him and to understand the truth to a great degree. Even the word that underlies the church, the ecclesia, has this idea of ‘separated out,’ the ‘called out ones,’ it is actually a form of the word for ‘called’ in the New Testament. ‘Called out’: ‘ec,’ meaning ‘out,’ ‘clesia’ are ‘the called’. So they are ‘the called-out ones’. So this idea of the church being ‘the called’ kind of comes from all that. Jesus of course was using it in a much broader way—anybody who could read or hear the truth.

So what we have are these two different ideas about calling. We are going to dwell on the second one, the Pauline one, of the called being those chosen by God. They are the ones, out of all humanity, that are given the opportunity to come under the blood of Christ and to receive His Spirit and to draw near to Him and to undergo the process of salvation all the way to glorification in His Kingdom. We can see a perfect example of this in Romans 8:28; a memory scripture, most of us know that one. Paul writes this out very clearly. This is a rather deeply theological section and we are only going to touch on various things, but I want to read it and then give you some idea of the themes that are here.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Now we see here that he is defining 'the called' in a very specific way.

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

He is showing here what God's plan is, what God's purpose is for 'the called.'

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

That is a lot of information in three small verses. But I think from these three verses we can see the gist of Paul's thinking about God's calling and election. He has taken the term 'kletos,' which means 'invited' or 'appointed,' and he uses that word to describe those whom God has chosen at this time to be saved and glorified. So that is Paul's use of the term 'the called'—those whom God has chosen at this time to be saved and glorified. Pretty simple definition.

One resource that I consulted went so far as to say that in Paul's epistles the calling of God is essentially equivalent to salvation; that you could almost say whenever the word 'calling' appeared, you could plug in 'salvation' and get the same meaning.

What he means is that the calling of God encompasses the entire salvation process. It is

kind of like shorthand for all that God has to do. It pretty much begins at the calling and it includes everything else that happens afterward all the way through to glorification. The reason why it can be used this way is because, as he said here, God is so confident that He could bring anybody that He calls all the way through to glorification. So if He calls, it is almost a done deal; in God's mind it is, because He is confident that He could bring you to salvation.

Now we know that there are ways that we can undermine that, but that is the idea that Paul is trying to get across. It should give us a great hope that if He has called us, He is confident that He is going to glorify us as well. All we have to do is cooperate. So if we want to put it into a very short summary here, 'the called' (as Paul uses it) are the saved, or if you want to make it progressive, those who are being saved. The called are the saved or those being saved. So when you are reading Paul and you come across the word 'the called' or 'the elect,' that is what he means—those who are in the process.

Let us notice a few specific points in this passage because it is such a good summary package on this subject.

1. The first point that we need to get out of this is that 'the called' as we know—His elect, the saints—are distinguished as those who love God and those who have been invited or summoned to be part of God's purpose. These people—these called, these chosen, these elect, these saints, however they are termed—have a special relationship with the Father and the Son and this special relationship in itself is part of a great master plan.

Remember Mr. Armstrong talking about God's great master plan? That great master plan is simply to create a universal God Family, one that God can use to govern the entire universe, a family of creators, a family like Him that will be able to, at future times, do astounding things for Him wherever He should send them.

These elect, being the firstfruits of that purpose, are a special treasure to Him. They are the first; they are the ones that are going to be the bride of Christ; they have a special place in His heart. As He says about Israel, they are the apple of His eye; now the church, as the Israel of God, is the apple of His eye. So they are holy and set apart as a group that is like a gemstone to Him. That is what He says in the parable, that when He went and saw this gemstone, this great pearl, He went out and purchased it—and we know He purchased it with His own life.

So that is how He feels about these called, these firstfruits, these elect. They are special

to Him, they have a special relationship with Him, and they reciprocate it—they love Him. So that is a very important point. All things work together for good to those who love God and who are the called. Both of those points have to be in there: they have been called and they really love God.

2. Being God and absolutely sovereign, able to plan ahead in meticulous detail, God was able to foreknow the ones He would choose. It is interesting that the word that Paul uses here is 'prognosis.' We use the same word today in medical terminology, "Doctor, what's your prognosis?" He is supposed to be able to see how things are going to progress and be able to give some sort of an idea of treatment. That is how the medical people use it. In this case, God was able to know beforehand (pre-know, prognosis, know before) what was going to happen and who He would choose. So Paul uses the word 'prognosis.'

Now 'predestined' the word that you find here (also in verses 29 and 30), is a kind of loaded theological term. Perhaps it would be better to use the term 'preordained' or 'pre-appointed' to give a little bit better understanding, because 'predestined' gives the idea that a person's fate, as it were, is known and certain and cannot be averted, whereas 'preordained' or 'pre-appointed' gives the better idea that the calling itself is what was preordained or pre-appointed—meaning the person was chosen or appointed beforehand, not necessarily that he will certainly be saved. So the term implies pre-knowledge of whom He would call to salvation, not pre-knowledge—like the Protestants think about it—as predestined to salvation. The important point here is that it is the calling that is predestined, not the salvation.

Even so, God is confident that He can bring all those He calls to salvation but the individual can still reject His calling and salvation. So what is preordained is that God had looked forward and said "There's going to be a person at this time, in this place, and he's going to have these attributes" and who knows, maybe He knows us by name. We do not really understand the foreknowledge of God that precisely but He is God, He can do whatever He wants, and He has all those abilities. But He says "Okay, that person is going to appear at this time, this place, to these parents etc. etc. etc. I want him or her and I'll call that person at the proper time." And then He puts all His efforts to making sure that person is saved.

So that is the idea that Paul is trying to get across here, that He looked far into the future from where He was in that distant past and He said "Okay, these people are going to be here and I'm going to preordain right now that I'm going to have that one and that one and that one. They'll be firstfruits to Me." So we are dealing with

mindboggling ideas here that we really cannot understand.

3. The third point, and it is a point we have already mentioned: God's calling indicates a process. It is not just a one-time invitation and everything is complete. It does not work that way. In a way, that is how the Protestants look at it with their 'once saved, always saved'—that God calls you and "Hey! That's it. You're in." and very little more has to be done; you cannot lose your salvation.

But the apostle is very clear here, especially in verse 30, that there are steps that the individual must progress through from start to finish. A couple of the steps have to do with God's work alone; the predestination or the pre-appointment and the calling—God does all that. But the next steps involve us to a great degree.

So a person is called, bringing him near to God; so that initiates the relationship, but it just does not end there; he is then justified. Now we have to be careful here because Protestants are likely to say that this is the original and only justification that happens when a person is baptized; so a person then comes under the blood of Christ, he is made right with God, and for a Protestant that is all that is necessary.

But here, when Paul uses the term 'justification,' he implies the entire process of sanctification as well because that is what fills up the space between the initial justification and glorification. Everything in between is that process of sanctification, from the initial justification all the way to our death.

So justification includes being made holy and righteous through God's grace, the wiping away of sins and imputing His righteousness to us and overcoming our carnal natures, growing in godly character, and transforming into the image of Christ. Those are things that take place over our entire conversion—as we learn God's way of life, we apply God's laws; we approach situations and have to figure out how to deal with them in a godly way; overcoming and all that stuff; producing fruit and all of that.

Paul is using a shorthand again, putting the term 'justification' in, and it fits just fine because we spend all our time becoming right with God and that is what 'justification' means—becoming right with God. Sure, it starts with things that He does for us but as we go through our Christian lives, we have a lot to do with becoming right with God. We have a lot to change in our character, in our mind, in our nature to become right with God.

So it is not just that initial thing that God does—the legal parts of making us just before

Him—but it also has to do with all those tests and trials and situations and all those other things that we have to go through in order to grow to be like Christ.

4. And then, finally, the called person is glorified through the resurrection from the dead at the return of Christ.

God is confident, as He says there in this verse, “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” It is very positive; He is very confident that He can bring us successfully through all of those steps; and even by the time we are called, He has already completed two of those steps and then He is urging us on throughout our entire lives and He is eager to get to the spot where He can glorify us. All we need to do is cooperate and He can bring us to that wonderful conclusion.

My last sermon was on human nature. We learned that human nature is the selfish, carnal thought process of mankind that is influenced by the evil attitudes and desires of Satan the Devil.

So in order to call individuals out of this world and to bring them into a relationship with Himself, God must challenge and break the hold of human nature on the person. He has to overcome an obstacle. He has to overcome the fact that we have been living in this world, selfishly doing our own thing, gratifying our desires, listening to Satan and his attitudes even though we are not aware we are doing so; and then being influenced also by this world that has been influenced by Satan the Devil and has been acting, living in a selfish way predominantly for many generations. This is what is facing God when He is going to call us.

How does God break the hold of human nature on us? How does He overcome the influence of Satan the Devil and this world upon us? What does He do to make us sit up and say, “Oh! God, You are there. What is this You’ve given me to understand?” There has got to be something that He does to get our attention, to wake us up. What does He do?

He cannot take human nature away; He leaves it there. In fact, the Bible shows us that in this life the elect will always have to fight that nature. Hopefully, over the years, it becomes easier but for most of us, we find that it gets harder, unfortunately, because that nature does not want to be suppressed, it wants to come out, and so we have to fight it all our lives. But God, even though He cannot take away human nature, He can give us the tools that we need to overcome it and suppress it, to fight it, to put His

nature at the rings. It is God's calling that begins that process.

Let us go to John 8. I just want to pull out one scripture. This is one of the arguments that the Jews had with Jesus. Jesus did not want to get into an argument with them, He was teaching them; but they always had something to say, they always came back. Here Jesus said, "The truth shall make you free" and they come back and say, "We have never been in bondage to anyone"—which was a silly lie.

Then He gives them the understanding that they are two very different groups of people—Jesus and His people versus the Jews and all the rest. He says they have two different sources. And of course, He gets down to talking in verse 44 saying that they were of the Devil; they were only doing what their father told them to do. Jesus was of His Father and He did what His Father wanted Him to do. Look at verse 43. He asks the question here and He answers it.

John 8:43 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.

"You are not able; you do not have the ability; you cannot listen to His word."

Except in a few examples of certain individuals, the Jews could never, never grasp what He was trying to explain to them; it was impossible for them to understand. You know, most of the discussion ended up with either them calling Him names: by 'Beelzebub,' or "You are of the Devil," or "You are a Samaritan," or whatever, or they would be picking up stones to try to kill Him as a blasphemer.

As He says here, they were tuned into Satan's broadcast and wanted to follow his will in everything, and because of that they were not able to understand the truth. Using a radio term, it was 'static,' it was like somebody was out there broadcasting (Jesus; He was giving the truth) and it was clear as day, but when it hit their ears all they heard was static and it did not make any sense to them. They could not figure it out.

What does God do to get them to tune into His channel? Let us go to Acts 16. This is when Paul was at Philippi, and you know the story that they went down to the river where people were praying on the Sabbath.

Acts 16:13-14 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us.

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She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. [Now notice this next sentence.] The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

Lydia was a Gentile from Thyatira. She was a God-fearer, probably a woman who had been listening in at the synagogue. She followed the truth as well as she could understand it from the Old Testament. And so she would, every Sabbath, in keeping the Sabbath, go down to the riverside to pray with the other women who were doing a similar thing.

Well, Paul shows up and he begins to speak to them; he begins preaching the Gospel. Out of all the women who were there, Lydia was the one who was able to understand and she was only able to understand because it says "The Lord opened her heart." God did something to her mind. He made her able to listen, to hear the words of the Gospel and they made sense.

Let us go to Acts 9. We are going to see the most amazing conversion of all—of the apostle Paul. What I want you to do is notice the change of heart; it happened to Paul just as it happened to Lydia, but it happened spectacularly to Paul. Notice the change. I am going to start in verse 1 because it sets the scene so that you understand how vile and hostile Saul was against the church, against the truth, against Christ, and against all Christ's people.

Acts 9:1-6 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he [This is where the change comes], trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Two seconds, five seconds, ten seconds, a minute, it does not matter; it was a very short time. Paul went from "murder and threats and slaughter and havoc" to "Lord, what do You want me to do?" His heart changed in an instant. As soon as God reached down and said "Open" he was able to understand, his ears were opened; and when Jesus

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said, "Arise and go into the city and you will be told what you must do," he did it; he obeyed his new Master. It happened that quick.

It is so amazing that God put this story in the Bible another two or three times so that we could understand that that is how God works. He could take the most vile, murderous, cretinous person in the entire world and in an instant change them into His greatest servant, if He wants to. But He had to overcome Paul's human nature and all that training that had made him such an enemy of the church of God. But He opened his heart and Paul immediately obeyed. We can get an idea of what happened here, in II Corinthians 3. Paul is talking about the Israelites. He says:

II Corinthians 3:14a But their minds were hardened. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament . . .

They do not understand when they read the Old Testament. They do not get what God was getting at even though they may keep every law to the letter. They do not get it! There is a veil there. Their heart is closed, as it were, to what God wants them to understand.

II Corinthians 3:14b-16 . . . because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

So God changes the heart and He opens up understanding. It is like 'What was foggy, now becomes clear.' Things that did not make sense, now are logical. Of course it works that way. Connections that were never made between what happened in one time to one person and at another time to another, now get made—those two were obeying the same Lord; they were following the same path; they were accomplishing parts of God's purpose. Then you can see progression, then you can see things work; the puzzle, as Mr. Armstrong said, begins to fit together. All these separate pieces that looked like nothing, now come to form what is the plan of God and the truth of God because God lifts the veil.

Let us go to the book of John in chapter 14 and we will see the means of this. He is speaking to His disciples here, and they had had Him working with them for these three-and-a-half years and He is about to go. But He says:

John 14:15-18 If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the

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Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

He said, "Okay. I may be going but I'm going to ask the Father to send Me back in Spirit, and I'll be in you; I'm not going to leave you alone; I'm going to give you what you need." Since He had been with them, He had been able to explain things to them and they had gone along just fine.

John 16:13-14 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

So what He is saying here is that even though He will not be there in person, He will be there in Spirit, inspiring and helping in whatever way is needed. So what happens in the process of the calling, in a similar way is what happens is God's Spirit begins to work with the person. It is not in them yet but it begins to work with the person and it guides him toward the truth, as the Spirit does here—"guiding [him] into all truth," it says. It glorifies Christ. That is another very important point.

The Spirit of God, as it begins working with a person who has been called, helps the person to see the central position of Christ and how he needs to listen to Christ, he needs to obey Christ, he needs to commit to Christ; so it leads to truth, it leads to glorifying Christ.

He also says that He will tell you things to come. What this means is that the Holy Spirit begins to give the newly-called person insight into God's plan. He begins to see how things come together and how things are going to work out. He would not have known this except the Spirit of God had begun working on his mind to clear up the ambiguities that were there because of the veil that was over his heart before. But after conversion, the Spirit does this all *in* him, not just with him. So there is the difference.

Please go to II Corinthians 8. I just want this as a wrap-up scripture to this; it is kind of out of context, but the principle is true. Let me just give you a little bit of the context. The Corinthians had decided that they were going to give a gift—a contribution—to the people in Jerusalem, and it had been a year and they had not gotten it all together to

send it with Paul. So he is giving them encouragement.

II Corinthians 8:10-12 And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. [Verse 12 is what I really want.] For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

The point I want here is that if there is a willing mind then there is a desire to complete the process. That is what God does. He gives us a willing mind, a desire to do more to see what comes next, to put things together, to make the picture complete, and it is a motivation.

And then, of course, as my dad was talking about—the profit advantage—he begins to see that as he puts these things together that “Hey, there’s a lot in this for me. If I accept this and do this and commit myself to this, I’m going to be a master of the universe.” That is what it comes down to; that is what God promises us, that we are going to be His sons and daughters with Him ruling in His government for all eternity.

Once the person sees this and says “Okay, here’s Satan’s way, and what does he say? Okay. Satan says I can do just about whatever I want to do now and have all my jollies and then I die...pah. Great! And then, if I do this other thing though, that God says I could have an abundant life without sin, I can do all these wonderful things, I have a family and children and all these blessings that will come down the pike; and you know what, I’m going to die, but He says He’ll raise me from the dead and I’m going to be glorified and live forever and have all these wonderful things and create till the end of time, of which there is no end. Okay, which one of these is better?” There is no comparison. Once the person begins to put these things together, Satan and his way does not have a chance to a person whom God has given a willing mind to.

But none of this can happen unless God first opens the mind to hear and believe; and He can use just about any situation one can imagine to make a person’s calling happen. Years ago we heard about somebody who was hit in the face with ‘The Plain Truth’ flying out somebody’s window; that is all it took; he picked it up, opened it up, liked it, and became a member of God’s church. God could use a magazine like that, a booklet, a broadcast, an Internet page, an email, a billboard, a piece of advice, a circumstance—it does not matter. A person could be attracted to the truth through a member’s example and that may be one of the best ways for God to call someone into

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His church, when He sees the truth of God in action in a person's life. It is a beautiful thing.

In any case, God is not limited at all in how He calls a person to salvation. No one limits the Holy One of Israel. He can use whatever situation He wants, whatever is best, to get that person's attention and to give him the willing mind that he needs.

I Peter 1:1-5 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

I Peter 1:13-16 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

We have been given a rare and precious opportunity through the calling of God to receive an eternal and magnificent inheritance as co-heirs with Christ of all there is. We must not be like those terribly sad lottery winners who squandered their fortunes by bad choices, but instead take Peter's advice and make the most of your holy calling.