

Romans 1:1 (William Woldridge Fereday) 69966

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“PAUL, a servant of Jesus Christ, an apostle by calling” (Rom. 1:1). Thus did Paul present his credentials to a company of saints whom he had not yet visited and to most of whom he was a stranger. Being especially the apostle of the Gentiles, he felt he had a responsibility towards them and desired some fruit among them, as among others. He had not been used of God to found the assembly in Rome; nor indeed had any other apostle. Unlike Philippi and Corinth, we have no scripture record of the commencement of the work of God in the great metropolis of the West. But Paul knew of the work, for their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world; and for many years had longed to pay them a visit, that he might impart to them some spiritual gift for their establishment.

The way being still hedged up, he wrote them the epistle now before us. He introduces himself as “an apostle by calling” —for so the phrase really means. His apostleship was derived from above without any intermediary of any sort. He had not received appointment from those who were apostles before him, still less had he thrust himself into the solemn position; it was a divine call. All ministry partakes of this character according to scripture. The source of it all is the risen Head in heaven. Having accomplished redemption and broken the power of the enemy, He ascended up on high and gave gifts unto men. He distributes the spoils of His victory among the objects of His favor—the members of His body. He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.

In all this there is no room for man, the work is wholly divine. He who has received a talent is responsible to trade with the same; it is a mark of the evil servant not to do so, or to wait for some other authorization (Matt. 25.). Nowhere in scripture do we find official appointment to preach the word; still less “a church” giving “a call” to a man to become its “minister”. Granted that many human questions and difficulties are avoided by conforming to such ways; but they are a departure from the truth nevertheless. The apostle had to endure a good deal of criticism in the course of his faithful service. The Corinthians sought a proof of Christ speaking in him, and said that he was rude in speech and in bodily presence weak, and that he only desired to make a gain of them. But he held steadily on his way through evil report and good report, setting no value on any human imprimatur, confiding in God. He was an apostle by calling; and this was enough for him.

Those to whom he wrote had experienced a divine call also, though of a different character. We read “to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, saints by calling.” “To be saints” entirely misses the mind of the Spirit. It is no question of what we ought to be in our manner of life, nor of a position or status to be earned; but the place that grace has given once for all to all who believe. Superstition has robbed many of true understanding and enjoyment of the term “saints.” The mass have been long accustomed to think of Matthew, and Paul, as having a place altogether peculiar and which pertain to but few others; and many think of the title merely in connection with certain faithful sons of the church who have been pontifically canonized years after death.

But the word of God is blessedly plain. All who believe, whether apostles or otherwise, are “saints (or holy ones) by calling.” Divine grace has detached us from the world and delivered us from all the guilt and ruin of our former condition, and has set us in holiness in the divine presence according to the value of the work of Christ and the acceptableness of His own blessed person. Nothing can ever alter this. Neither the malice of Satan nor the feebleness and inconsistency of men can affect it for an hour. What unspeakable comfort for our hearts!

Not that this should make us indifferent as to our walk. On the contrary, the more divine grace is known, and the better Christian standing is understood, the more holy and godly will the walk be. The difference is immense between trying to become a saint by earnest painful effort (an impossibility really); and seeking to walk soberly, righteously, and godly, because we know we are saints, beloved of God, established in divine favor. Being holy ones by calling, it behooves us to be holy in practice. As He who has called us is holy, so should we be in all manner of behavior. The new nature which we have received from God should display itself in the power of the Holy Spirit: the old, which faith reckons dead, never can. God looks for fruit in all His own. W.W.F.