

## The Making of Paul Acts 9:10-19

Last week we looked at the breaking of Saul, and his remarkable conversion. And we focused mainly on the doctrines of sovereign grace as they are summarized in the famous acronym, TULIP, or the acronym I prefer: ELECT. And it is a marvelous passage for teaching on God's sovereign grace. But today, we are going to look at the making of Paul. God not only sovereignly breaks down, but He rebuilds a new man from the ashes. And we are going to be seeing that God is just as sovereign in this work of calling as He was in conversion. And even though there are many other things we could address this morning, I just want to focus on the issue of calling to ministry. There may be some of you whom God will call into the eldership or into the pastorate in the future, and it is important that you think about this issue of calling very carefully. I don't pretend to have the last word on the subject, but I do want to at least have you think about it. And for the rest of you, this is not an irrelevant subject. You are the ones who discern the outward call when you vote for officers. Or, if you don't vote, you are still the ones who pray for your leaders that they not stumble and fall away from their callings. I mean, think about it: if even a Jeremiah could be tempted to no longer bring God's Word to the people because he was sick and tired of the flak, you can be sure that your present leaders sometimes have those temptations. Most pastors and ruling elders do. And you can pray that God's irresistible call would work in us just like it worked in Jeremiah. Jeremiah tells us that even though he wanted to quit, he couldn't. God's Word burned like a fire within him until he finally had to continue to carry out his calling. So this passage is relevant to all of us. And I urge you not to turn off your minds simply because you are not called to the ministry.

I believe that we are living in a period of time when there is a crisis of huge proportions on this issue of calling. And it is not just a crisis of church members failing to honor this calling, but it is also a crisis of pastors ignoring the subject. James Dobson says that 60% of pastors eventually leave the ministry because they can't hack it. Those are disturbing statistics, and whatever the reason, they are one of many indicators that a crisis is facing the church of America. PCA pastor, Mike Ross said that if those statistics are true, "then we need to face this fact - the vast majority of these dropouts were never called to ministry!... If the "gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Ro. 11:29)." And that in itself is an intriguing statement: the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. What does that mean? Well, it

means at least that you can't just choose this as a career and later decide to do something else.

In the Reformed Magazine, *Banner of Truth*, Dr. Campbell from the Free Church of Scotland said this:

“It seems that the concept of a call to the ministry has fallen on hard times. A recent survey conducted by Affinity, the evangelical church partnership organization, engaged with 400 ministers between the ages of 21 and 40. Of these, 30% said they were confused over what constitutes a call, and only 46% of them - less than half - said that they had felt a special call to the ministry.”

Now I will be the first to admit that there is controversy on this issue of calling, and whether there even is a calling that can be felt or sensed or inwardly known. But I stand in a long Reformed tradition when I say that without an immediate call of God upon our souls, we are running when God has not sent us. The Presbyterian writer, James Henley Thornwell said, “That a supernatural conviction of duty, wrought by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost, is an essential element in the evidence of a true vocation [or calling] to the ministry, seems to us to be the clear and authoritative doctrine of the Scriptures. Men are not led to the pastoral office as they are induced to select other professions of life; they are drawn, as a sinner is drawn to Christ, by a mighty, invincible work of the Spirit. The call of God never fails to be convincing....” That's my position. Now it's important to realize that my position is *not* that all pastors will have a vision like Paul did. It's important to hear me on this. My position is *not* that all elders or pastors will have a vision like Paul did. God's calls to ministry are as unique as the individuals are. In fact, even the *other eleven apostles* did not have a vision like Paul had. Yet they were just as irresistibly drawn into the ministry as Paul was, and their calling can be summarized by the points that I am making this morning.

Down through history Reformed writers have used the call of Paul, who is still being called Saul in this chapter, as a paradigm for how God calls all ministers to office. And you might question that, because apostles were special people, weren't they? And I would say, “Yes. They were special. Everyone admits that.” But I want to establish that extraordinary and ordinary offices all received an immediate call of God upon their souls. It's not just the church that sends these people: Christ Himself sends them on their mission even before the church recognizes that call. As Dabney said, without a call, a pastor's sermon becomes simply a speech and lacks the authority and power of God behind it.

- I. There are five distinct orders of ministry that are directly called of God in the book of Acts. Ephesians 4:11 defines this five-fold ministry as:
  - A. Apostles
  - B. Prophets
  - C. Evangelists
  - D. Pastors/Shepherds (note that pastors & teachers are grouped together even though they are distinct: one office, two orders)
  - E. Teachers

If you look at your outlines, you will see under point #1 that there are five orders of ministry in the New Testament that have this special, unique calling of God that is quite distinct from other vocations. You will find all five in the book of Acts, but let's start by looking at Ephesians 4:11 where all five kinds of officer are listed in one verse. Ephesians 4:11. Speaking of Jesus, it says, **And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.** I want you to notice three things from that passage. First, Christ Himself gives these officers to the church. They don't volunteer, though they recognize that Christ has chosen them. The church doesn't decide, though the church is responsible to recognize that Christ has chosen them. The church may not put people into office who are not called by God. Just by analogy, you can think of David who was called by God to be the king of Israel. It took years before Israel recognized that call and outwardly confirmed it with their vote. But God's call upon David's life preceded any recognition that they might give. It was an immediate call of God upon His life. It was not mediated through Israel. Now he couldn't become king until Israel confirmed the call, but my point is that the call itself is given by God and is simply recognized by the church. The word "Himself" emphasizes the fact that this is the choice of Christ. No one should be in any of those five offices unless Christ has given them to *be* in that office.

Second, notice that though there is a difference in what each office does, there is not a difference in the giving. The variable is on the ministry, not on the call. For example, the apostles and prophets were the inspired foundation of the church according to chapter 2:20, so the *content* of their ministry is *quite* different from the content of the ministry of the *evangelists, pastors and teachers*. We still have the apostles and prophets speaking to us through the Scriptures, and their inspired ministry is quite different from mine. But the giving of them to the church is not the difference. And James Henley Thornwell and many others like him point out that this giving is Christ's call to the ministry. The church can accept or reject the ministry, but

the call is given immediately (as opposed to being mediated through people). The variable is with the ministry, not with the calling.

Third, let me point out that the distinction between pastors and teachers is the same distinction you find elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments between ruling elders and teaching elders. When we eventually get to Acts 20 you will see that the elders are called shepherds (which is the same Greek word used here for pastor). Rodney is a pastor. Even though there is overlap between the two ministries, the primary work of ruling elders is shepherding families, and the primary work of teaching elders is teaching. Otherwise Paul would not have distinguished between pastors and teachers.

But this verse also supports the PCA position that eldership is one group or one office with two orders. Recent grammarians have shown that the Granville Sharpe rule cannot be applied to Ephesians 4:11 because it is really a different form of Greek. For a while in the 1900's, it was popular to make shepherds and teachers one gift, as if they were pastor/teachers. Many have therefore have gone to the opposite extreme and insisted that they are completely separate offices. However, most grammarians today point out that the odd grammar that is used in the Greek here links the two together under the word "some" while distinguishing them with a strong form of the word "and."<sup>1</sup> In other words, pastors and teachers are two separate entities within the same grouping. We say that they share the office of elder, but are two different orders. So those are the five kinds of officer, and you find all five kinds of officer directly called by God to the ministry, and the church later recognizing God's call upon their lives.

Let me give you some examples: We will start with the extraordinary offices. Romans 1:1 – **called to be an apostle. Acts 13:2, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which *I have called them.*"** Luke 11:49, **I will send them prophets and apostles...** So Christ directly sends both apostles and prophets. I've just given a couple examples, but there are 65 times that prophets are said to be sent, given or raised up by the Lord, and that they dare not go unless they are sent. That is God's calling.

But what I want to point out is that in both the Old and the New Testaments, God calls, sends and raises up ordinary officers as well. He uses

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 284. "“There are no clear examples of nouns being used in a plural TSKS construction to specify one group. However, we are not shut up to the ‘entirely distinct groups’ option only. The uniting of these two groups by one article sets them apart from the other gifted leaders. Absolute distinction, then, is probably not in view.”

exactly the same language. The priesthood was an ordinary office in the Old Testament. When we speak of ordinary and extraordinary offices, we are speaking of the distinction between those who do not have infallible revelation and those who do. Priests were not inspired in their offices unless they were also prophets. Every form of priesthood was an ordinary office. And yet Hebrews says that priests required the same kind of calling that Jesus did. Let me read that to you. It's Hebrews 5:1-6: Verse 1 says, **For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men...** Down to verse 4. **And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him:** and it goes on to speak of the Father's immediate calling in Christ's life. And from other passages we know that God's call to Christ *was* immediate, and yet Hebrews compares that call to the call of an ordinary priest. Neither one dares to take the office to Himself.

You find the same of the elders in the Old Testament. They were ordinary officers, sometimes called elders and sometimes called Shepherds. Jeremiah 3:15 says, ***I will give you shepherds according to My heart*** and he rebukes others who were not true shepherds. Ezekiel does the same. Jeremiah chapters 49 and 50 calls these Shepherds chosen by God and appointed by God. Jesus directly sends them. Acts 20:28 has Paul talking to the elders of the church, and he tells them, **Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit made you overseers...** It's not the church that makes them overseers. It's the Holy Spirit. The church merely recognizes and confirms that call, but the Holy Spirit had already given the elders this calling. So ruling elders have an immediate call of God upon their souls.

He sends forth the teachers as well. Speaking of what would happen after His resurrection, Jesus said, **Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city.** (Matt 23:34). The wise men are the elders and the scribes are the teaching elders, but Jesus says that he sends them just like He sends a prophet. And we will give more Scriptures as we go through the outline. But with that as a background, let's dive into Acts chapter 9 focusing especially on verses 10-19.

- II. The call of Paul was sovereignly given (v. 10ff)
  - A. Paul's call preceded the coming of Ananias (hinted at in verses 11-12; explicit in Acts 26:14-18).

Verse 10 says, **Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”** We can see here and throughout this passage that the call of Paul to ministry was sovereignly given. God was the one who has the initiative. I’ll let you study it in your own, but if you read the expanded version of this call in Acts 26:14-18 you will see that God gave Saul a detailed outline of what he was called to do before Ananias got to him. Ananias did not give him the call. He simply confirmed it.

B. Notice no “apostolic succession from Peter” (“a certain disciple”)

Secondly, verse 10 shows that there was no *apostolic* succession from Peter either. God used an ordinary disciple to confirm this call to Paul. Verse 10 says, **a certain disciple**. We aren’t told if he is an officer or a lay person. But he is *not* one of the other apostles.

C. Notice no holy place (“Damascus”)

Notice too that he receives this call in Damascus, not in Jerusalem. Saul was outside the country of Israel when he was called by God, and so we cannot say that it was related to holy ground or being in the church.

D. God chooses (v. 15; cf. 1 Tim. 1:12 – “putting me into the ministry”)

Verse 15 indicates that *God* chooses Saul. He says, **“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine...** When Paul looks back to this time in 1 Timothy 1:12 he says that God had already put Saul into the ministry: **putting Me into the ministry**. It wasn’t the church that put him into the ministry – God did. That is God’s prerogative. That’s why Jesus tells us to pray to God to raise up pastors. Matthew 9:38 says, **“Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”** Ultimately, God is the sender of workers throughout the New Testament period of harvest. Acts 20:28 says that the ordinary office of elder is one in which the Holy Spirit Himself makes them overseers. God doesn’t tag His OK to men whom the church selects. The church is supposed to recognize those whom God has made elders.

Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones said, “You can no more send yourself into the pulpit than you can send yourself to China as an official ambassador from the US. A Gospel minister must be God-called.” You see what he is saying there? Not just any US citizen is an ambassador to another country. Only those whom the US has called are ambassadors. Any citizen can talk about America and what it represents, but the Chinese will only consider that to be the person’s opinion. And it may be a very solid opinion, but only an ambassador directly represents the US. And the US backs up their

ambassador. And that language of Ambassador and representation is what is used of a minister.

E. Notice that this is not Paul's wishful thinking

1. The call Saul had already received (see Acts 26:14-18) was being confirmed via Ananias
2. Ananias was a man who was skeptical of Paul's calling.

Fifth, notice that this was not a hallucination as some people claim; this was not wishful thinking of an overanxious person. This was not autosuggestion. First, the identical call that God had given to Saul earlier, was being confirmed by Ananias, a man who had not met Saul, and a man who was extremely suspicious about the authenticity of Saul's conversion. If anything, he doubted Saul's calling, and yet God insisted that Saul was indeed called.

F. This was not a career decision, but a definite call from God (v. 10 – “the Lord said in a vision”; verse 12 – “a vision”; verses 15-16

Finally, this was not a career decision. There are so many people who enter the ministry because they think it would be a nice vocation for them. There are people who become elders because they think it will give them prestige. But throughout this passage it becomes clear that *God* called Saul, and Saul would have been in disobedience if he did not go. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16, **woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!** Those who are truly called of God have this same compulsion to serve God, and though they may be tempted to quit numerous times, this calling of God will not let them off the hook. John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, fought the tendency in Anglican Churches to treat the ministry as a career. He said, “None but He who made the world can make a Minister of the Gospel.” Albert Mohler credits a lack of calling to the disastrous results of ministry in America. And he says that none of the following are legitimate proofs of calling. Don't even think of entering the ministry if these are your motives.

- Ambition to be noticed, to prove yourself, or to "make a difference."
- Confidence that you could do well in the ministry.
- Compassion for hurting people.
- Fluency in public speaking.
- Knowledge of the Bible.
- Failure at all other types of work.
- Belief that ministry would be the best means to an easy life, study and intellectual pursuits, or wealth.
- Acquiescence to the expectation of a parent or the selfish opinion of others.
- Conviction that the church needs you.

He said, “Do not enter the ministry if one of these is your main motivation. You must be called.” Mike Ross, Glenn Durham’s former pastor, goes further and says, “The ministry is a lazy man's dream, an ambitious man's nightmare, and a godly man's vision. It's often hard at first to tell the difference between the three. A man ought to listen to Jesus Christ the Caller in this sacred calling: "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Nor is he fit for the ministry of that kingdom. So "if you can do anything other than pastor," I suggest you try it. In fact, even if you can't do anything but pastor, try something else for a season. For once you grab hold of the sacred plow, there can be no looking back.” You see, when God the sovereign calls, you cannot look back. That’s why in the PCA you will come under church discipline if you quit pastoring, because it means that you were either falsely in the ministry and not called, or it means that you are being disobedient to a heavenly calling. And so, there are many people that I seek to talk out of becoming pastors. Sure they have abilities, but I don’t think they have a calling.

III. This call was bathed in prayer (v. 11 – “for behold, he is praying”)

And this is why point III is so important. Point III is that this call was bathed in prayer. According to Acts 26, Paul was already given the call before he saw Ananias, but this call no doubt shook Saul to his foundations and made him cry out to the Lord for strength. When you really understand what is involved in the pastoral ministry, it is a fearful thing. Verse 11 says, “**the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.**” Ministry that is entered into without prayer is a dangerous venture, for it may indicate a trust in self rather than a trust in God. It may indicate that this person does not understand all that is involved in this call. Later in this book you will see that officers were selected after prayer and fasting, and Paul was engaged in prayer and fasting here. This is why Paul begged the people, **brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you.** He knew that he could not fulfill his high calling in his own strength. And if you are one who is wrestling with this sense of call, I have eight Biblical tests that I could administer to you in private.

IV. This call required consecration (v. 16 – “how much he must suffer”)

A. This involves obedience, not personal gratification (vv. 6,15-16)



The fourth major point that I wanted to address is that a call to ministry requires complete consecration. I don't think this was necessarily a pleasant thought for Saul that he was going to be called to be an apostle. In fact, God is quite blunt in verse 16: **For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.** God didn't want him going into this blind. He was letting Paul know that the ministry would be extremely tough, and that he would have to put his all on the altar to follow this call. This issue of consecration is an issue that many pastors and ruling elders fail on. And I have tried to break down this consecration into a few subpoints.

First of all, it involves obedience, not personal gratification. The first words out of Paul's mouth in verse 6 were "**Lord, what do you want me to do?**" It shows that his heart was now aimed in a right direction. God's response in verse 6 was, **Arise, and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.** Verses 15-16 make it clear that this was not a calling for Paul's personal gratification. People who enter the ministry for personal gain, for the money, for attention, fame, self-esteem will be sadly disappointed. In fact, they will probably end up being crushed by the ministry because the Bible says that hope deferred makes the heartsick. And they will have that false hope deferred. The ministry is not fun. Your whole life is open to inspection and criticism; everybody knows your budget; you live in a glass house; you have numerous critiques from arm chair experts - and every church has got its experts to keep you in line, and of course God expects you to have a humble attitude towards such criticisms, and he expects you not to get bitter when you are betrayed, stabbed in the back, attacked by Satan and used by others. And yet, I can have joy in my ministry because my sense of calling comes from Christ, not from the people. Paul understood that the whole purpose of his ministry was to please the Lord. And I think it can be beautifully summed up in Romans 14:7-8

**Romans 14:7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.**

**Romans 14:8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.**

Now, that should really be true of every believer, but it is especially critical that we have this motive before we enter the ministry. And you need to pray that we would maintain this motive. Have you ever wondered why missionaries are willing to face danger and suffering and constant risk? Talk about a difficult job (often with no immediate dividends). You can't explain their drive in terms of anything you will get back in this life. There has got to be a God-centered motive.

B. This involves faithfulness, not worldly success (v. 15 – “bear My

name”)

Secondly, consecration involves faithfulness, not worldly success. His goal was to bear Christ’s name, verse 15. A pursuit of success has made many a pastor either be puffed up in pride or to go down in flames. But if we have a desire to be faithful whatever the results, we will have what it takes to weather the storms. I mean, think of the commission that was given to Isaiah. God told him that nobody was going to listen to him. In terms of church growth movement, he was an utter failure. And yet, Isaiah fixed his eyes on being faithful to his Lord, and he was sustained.

C. This involves service to others, not self-service (v. 15 – “before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel”)

Thirdly, it involves service to others, not self-service. Verse 15 says that he was called to serve before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Pray that we would maintain servants hearts. That’s what our ministry is to be about. Yet many pastors have this quite absent from their lives.

D. This involves endurance not comfort and applause (v. 15 – “how many things he must suffer.”)

Fourth, consecration involves a willingness to endure suffering rather than seeking comfort and applause. Again, Jesus speaks of **how many things he must suffer**. And a strong sense of calling from the Lord will enable us to endure no matter what.

Many people say that ministry stands or falls on three things: a sense of calling, competencies and character. You could think of those as three legs of a stool. If any one of the three legs is missing, the stool of ministry will not stand up. It will fall down. A person can have a calling from God and strong moral character, but he is missing the skills that are needed to lead, no one will follow. So skills are definitely important. On the other hand, if he has strong character and strong skills but no calling of God upon his life, there will be no power; there will be no endurance, and the fruit of his ministry will only be what the right arm of his flesh can accomplish. He’ll be tempted to bail out. If he has strong calling and strong skills but no character, he will ruin a ministry with his moral failings. So we need all three.

But according to Jesus you cannot have those three fully developed if you do not have two other components of healthy leadership. And you might think of these as two additional legs on the stool. Union with God and community with believers. Those are the two greatest commandments according to Jesus – to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And of those two, which comes first? Our relationship with God must come first, right?

E. This requires spiritual power (v. 17 – “be filled with the Holy Spirit”)

And so, point E says that real consecration to ministry requires spiritual power. Why did Paul need to be filled with the Spirit in verse 17? For the same reason that the other apostles needed it in Acts 2. Acts 1:8 says, **You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses...** Just as Paul needed that power, every minister of God today needs such power or we will dry up and wither on the vine; we will become joyless and dry in our ministry. In fact, you will begin to sense that we are just going through the motions and putting in time. Pray for daily filling of the Spirit for your elders. Pray that we would not do our work in our own strength, but we would find joy in the Holy Spirit and strength through that joy. J. B. Phillips paraphrase of Ephesians 1:19-20 says, **"How tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God."**

F. This requires personal preparation (note that the three years of training Paul received from Christ in Arabia – see Galatians 1:15-18 – probably occurred after verse 19a and before 19b)

Sixth, this consecration requires personal preparation. Even the extraordinary offices of apostle required three years of intensive preparation. The other eleven had already had these three years of leadership training, but Paul received it during the next three years in Arabia. Let me read to you Galatians 1:15-18.

**Galatians 1:15 ¶ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, Galatians 1:16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, Galatians 1:17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Galatians 1:18 ¶ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.**

Paul immediately went to Arabia, then returned to Damascus for a time, then went up to Jerusalem. There has been debate as to when that happened. If you look at Acts 9, some people place the three years right before verse 26; others place it right before verse 23, and others right before verse 20; but I think that it came between 19a and 19b. Otherwise I don't see how the two “immediately's” fit. Luke skips over the three years, but Paul considered it an important part of his preparation for ministry. No person

should enter the ministry as a novice. It requires a great deal of learning. And this itself shows consecration to the Lord.

- V. There was confirmation of the call (v. 10-12)
  - A. Others recognize the call (vv. 10-12,21)
  - B. He shows the gifting (v. 20)
  - C. God's hand of blessing is on Saul's work (v. 22)

I will have to breeze through some of the points in your outline quickly. Every call in the Bible requires confirmation (Roman numeral V). You see confirmation in this passage in Ananias recognizing Paul's being set apart. You see further confirmation in the fact that he shows that he is indeed gifted. Some people want to enter the ministry, but have no giftings for ministry. The third confirmation that we see is in verse 22 which says, **But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.** He was growing into his calling. God's hand of blessing was clearly upon what he did. Later, the apostles recognize that Saul is set apart to the apostleship in verse 26ff. In Acts 13 another section of the church recognizes Paul's credentials. So there is always a confirmation process.

And the same is true today. People may believe themselves to be called, but until God moves the people to recognize this call, they are without a ministry. And that is as it should be. We have far too many people who think they are called, and they just go off and do their own thing. They are not under authority; they are not accountable. That is a dangerous position to be in, and it is dangerous for the people who are under their ministry. Even an amazing man like David had to wait before he fulfilled his office. God's call is not enough. It must be confirmed by the church. And in your prayer life you can be praying that God would give wisdom to the church all over this world to recognize who are truly called and who are hirelings, or worse yet, who are wolves in sheep's clothing. But Christ had no room for shepherds who were simply in it for the money. In John 10 he called them hirelings. Hirelings have no call of God upon their lives. Instead, they have chosen a career. They are in it because they want to be in it. And Christ says, "Guess who lays down his life for the sheep when push comes to shove. It's not a hireling. He takes off. It's the shepherd with the call of God upon his heart." There are many churches that are being shepherded by hirelings, and it is not healthy. In fact, God pronounces His anger against shepherds who pretend to represent the Lord and yet the Lord has not sent them. Pray for revival and that God would send forth workers into His vineyard.

VI. There were obstacles to the call being achieved (v. 13-14)

Of course, verses 13-14 show that there can be obstacles to a person who truly is called of God. We want to acknowledge that. There can be all kinds of things that hinder him and slow him down from entering into the ministry. I'll just read verses 13-14.

**Acts 9:13 ¶ Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.**

**Acts 9:14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”**

This is skepticism. Ananias doesn't believe that Saul is really converted. And there will always be those who reject the authority of an elder or a pastor or who express skepticism. A man of God cannot allow those things to discourage his heart. He stands before the Lord, and the Lord can change the circumstances, and He can change the hearts of people as they witness his service. Many of the shepherds of old had to earn this respect over time. David certainly had a lot of opposition to his entering the call of God, but in God's providence it came to pass. And we too need to be patient. Some young people who are called by God into ministry assume that they should enter the ministry instantly. Why? Because God called me. But like Saul we need to have patience to get trained. I sometimes wondered if I was ever going to get into the ministry because it took so long to earn my way through college and seminary. Of course, I was informally ministering all along as anyone who is called of God will do. But even that was an important part of my preparation. In verses 26 and following the Jerusalem church expresses this same skepticism all over again. A man of God cannot be bitter over such things. There will always be opposition and hindrances.

VII. The person called does not represent His own opinions (v. 15)

A. Chosen by God (“chosen vessel”)

B. Represents God (“Mine to bear My name”)

Seventh, the reason a unique call is given to these five-fold ministries is because these people all represent a different aspect of the Lord's authority to the people. *They better be called by Him if they claim to represent Him.* They aren't just sharing their opinions or speeches. At least they shouldn't be. They are chosen vessels of the Lord and are required to represent Christ and to bear His name. They must speak with authority. If I were to preach simply what you wanted to hear, I would not be faithful to the Lord. And this is one of the reasons why James 3:1 says, **My brethren,**

**let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.** When I was doing research for this sermon, I came across the reason why Dabney and almost all older Presbyterians did not allow any but Teaching Elders to preach from the pulpit. Larger Catechism 158 says the same. Others could exhort from the pulpit (especially if they were being trained for the ministry) – because exhortation is a brother to brother relationship. But they could not preach, because preaching was considered to be a representation of heaven by heaven’s messengers. It’s an issue of calling. And we have been wrestling as a session with whether this ancient distinction between lay exhortation and TE preaching is Biblical, and I think I have finally understood it. According to church doctrine, I stand before you as God’s ambassador, and I could only do that if He called me to represent Him. So from here on in, let’s make a distinction between lay exhortation (which is just a brother to brother sharing of Scripture from the pulpit) and preaching, which means to herald or to represent God’s authority.

- VIII. There was no room for pride in this calling
- A. He was the chief of sinners (v. 13-14 with 1 Tim. 1:13-17)
  - B. He was a messenger (v. 15)
  - C. He would suffer in the line of duty (v. 16)
  - D. He was a brother to Ananias (v. 17b)
  - E. He needed the filling of the Holy Spirit to accomplish his work (v. 17c)
  - F. He needed to be ministered to by ordinary Christians and was dependent upon the body (v. 17-19)
    - 1. Prayer for filling of Spirit
    - 2. Prayer for healing (v. 12,17-18)
    - 3. Baptism
    - 4. Hospitality (v. 19 – “received food”)
    - 5. Training (Gal. 1:15-18 between v 19a and v 19b)
    - 6. Part of body (v. 19)

But having said that, I think the last point is so important as well in order to bring balance. When there is a true call of God upon our lives, there is no room for pride. Ananias knows that Saul is a great sinner, and in 1 Timothy 1:13-17 Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. Ministers need to constantly keep in mind that in ourselves we cannot stand.

In verse 15 we see that he is simply a messenger. *God* is great, and the message is great, but not the messenger Paul. In 1 Corinthians 9:16 Paul said, **For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity**

**is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!** Do you see what he is saying? He has nothing in which to boast. He is simply doing what God mandates that he do. He takes himself out of the equation and he points to the Lord whom he represents.

Verse 16 shows suffering in the line of duty. That is hardly something that a prideful person will want to hear. But a humble person is willing to do whatever God calls him to do.

In verse 17 Ananias refers to Saul as “Brother Saul.” There’s no reverend, right reverend, your holiness, your most excellent holiness or any other such nonsense. He was equal to Ananias in access to the throne, even though Saul was being given greater authority. Ministers must never lose sight of the fact that their superior authority does not give them any reason for pride or a superior attitude. We are different in authority but equal in nature. On the other hand, the fact that I am your brother and subject to critique does not give you the right to neglect the authority that I have in your lives as preacher. And the same would be true of ruling elders, even though they had a different ministry.

In verse 17 Saul is reminded that he can’t do anything worthwhile in his own strength. He needs the Holy Spirit to empower him. What a wonderful reminder that we officers need to hear.

And then God puts Saul into a position where he is forced to need the ministry of the body as a whole. Ananias prays for God’s Spirit in Saul’s life, and we need your prayers that we might be empowered. Paul constantly begged his people to pray for him. He knew where his power came from and he knew his dependence on the body.

Just like any other believer, Saul was prayed for by others for healing. He receives baptism in verse 18. In verse 19 it says, **So when he had received food and was strengthened.** Others served him.

And then finally, he recognized his need for the body of Christ. Verse 19 ends by saying, **Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.**

But though he is dependent, Saul has everything that he needs for life and godliness. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul says, **But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us.** In other words, don’t allow the fact that you are a jar of clay, a weak instrument; keep you from the office if God is calling you. Fill yourself with His presence and you will have everything that you need to feed others.

When God called Moses, Moses gave excuse after excuse. The people won’t listen to me or believe me; I don’t speak well; others can do it better

than me; etc etc. But what was God's message? I will go with you. Gideon had a hard time believing he could do what God called him to do. And what was God's message. I will go with you. The heroes of the Bible never had faith in themselves. They placed their faith in God. And if God has called you to ministry and you fear and quake at the terrible responsibilities and the sufferings that are in store, take heart: God always empowers those whom He calls. Though Jesus came in weakness, God's power was made manifest in him. Though Jeremiah was fearful and felt inadequate, God used him to tear down empires and to build up new ones with the Word of God.

We don't need strong men in leadership in America, we need men who are called of God and who are willing to obey that call. Pray that it will be so. Amen.