

**Galatians 1:11-24 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup>I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. <sup>12</sup>I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

<sup>13</sup>For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup>I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup>But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup>to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. <sup>17</sup>I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup>Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas<sup>a</sup> and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup>I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup>I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

<sup>21</sup>Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup>I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup>They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup>And they praised God because of me.

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Dear friends of our Lord and Saviour IX: Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and the Lord IX + **What a wonderful confidence the apostle St. Paul has:** Called, commissioned, ordained and installed by the Lord of the Church himself! Not by human institutions or governments, but by divine ordinance and mandate. Just like the living God appeared to the prophet of old - Isaiah – there in the temple of Jerusalem and sent him on his godly mission and just as our dear Lord and saviour IX showed himself in person to call that tax-collector Matthew to leave everything and follow him as one of the 12 apostles – so the risen Lord, who had suffered capital punishment innocently on the accursed tree, was dead and buried, showed himself to that violent persecutor Saul on the way to Damascus, revealed himself alive in all his glory at the right-hand of the Father: *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?* ... Rather: *Go and be my apostle!*

Obviously, if you meet your maker, saviour and eternal judge – there is no argumentation, no objection, just obedience, subservience and compliance. There's no haggling about service agreements, not dispute over term limits or retirement conditions, no consultations with lawyers, but just a matter of getting up and following suit, wherever he leads you – never mind what the others say: "My immediate response was not to consult any human being..."

**And others do object!** The world doesn't see it that way. Neither do Devil, sinful opponents and evil consorts. Nor do you as your corrupted self and sinful heart perceive it that way. Common objections are: I'm too young. I'm too old. I can't speak. I'm of the wrong race, colour and continent. There are others more suitable. I've got a family, a lucrative job and just so many other ties, obligations and things... And Moses hid in Midian, undercover, the prince now a shepherd. And Jonah ran away, hid on a ship and was cast out to the fishes... And St.Peter said: "*Lord – not that way of suffering and dying on the cross, but rather take this escape route, glory is bigger and better.*" (IX response: *Go behind me Satan!*) And he took up the sword and cut off the ear of the one called Malchus. (IX reprimands him: *Put away that sword! Whoever takes up the sword, shall die by the sword!*) Finally: "*I don't know him. I'd rather be accursed than be known to him!*" (IX asks him: "*Kephas, do you love me?*") We should remember the warning of IX: "*Whoever denies me among men, will be denied by the Son of Man before the Father!*")

**But the Lord can change stone hearts into living and loving hearts.**

It's his promise and this year's watchword: "*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*" (Ezekiel 36:26) God changes Saul into Paul, the persecutor becomes the apostle and missionary. Having seen the Lord – like the other 12 apostles – and now having been called, commissioned and installed like them, St. Paul goes his way "*to preach IX to the gentiles*". They, who did not know him before – there in Syria and Cylicia - they only heard the report: "*The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.*" And they praised God because of me. Praise God for all those, whom he has called, delivered and saved from the powers of darkness to the glory of his light, whom he has drawn from the shadows of death and the darkness of godless existence. Hallelujah, Hallelujah + Praise him, who can call out of

nothing that it be something. Changing unbelieving stones and faithless bricks, rocks into living hearts, praising his name and acknowledging his Lordship and trusting his goodness, which is new every morning.

Now we are not apostles and prophets. We did not see IX like them. There is a very real difference between them and us. However God still calls, educates, trains, tests, ordains and installs men into his office of the ministry and service of his people as he has done in the past 2000 years in the Holy Christian Church. He does this in good, holy order i.e. "*rite vocatus*" so that they might teach all that he has entrusted to them i.e. that his gospel be purely preached and his holy sacraments administered to create faith in him and his most precious forgiveness of sins, that we are in God's favour, that he – the highest God is not against, but for us – and that his wrath no longer reigns over us because of our iniquity, failures, evil corruption and most dreadful sinfulness and faithlessness, but that we should not be afraid, but rather take heart, for he has forgiven us all our sins for IX sake, therefore his peace, which passes all understanding reigns over us for us and our salvation + Hallelujah, Hallelujah +

The church has the right to call suitable men to this office in God's own name. God has given this power to his holy Church. That means, whoever is called, installed and ordained by the Church is called, installed and ordained in the name and authority of God himself – so that this calling is as firm here on earth as it is in heaven and in God's kingdom, which lasts forever and ever. Therefore, whoever is properly called, ordained and installed is called to have the very same confidence as St. Paul himself and the prophet Isaiah even – to preach that one and only gospel, which was revealed by these holy men of God in ages long gone by, but which endures forever and ever. God himself does this by his eternal goodwill and gracious election, predestination and providence which is well grounded and perfect even before the world and everything visible and invisible were established in the beginning. We, together with all the Church past, present and coming can join in praising him for this his goodness and kindness by which he rules and ordains the church + Hallelujah, Hallelujah +

There is obviously a negative side to this too – and that's to serve as a warning for us and also as a very serious deterrent for us and all holy saints of the church – that is the terrible possibility of denial, disavowal,

apostasy, the renunciation and repudiation of the faith in IX. There is no other way to the Father. All else is accursed, doomed and most terrible damnation. Just think of Cain – the murderer of his brother; Saul, the failed and suicidal king; Judas, the reprobate apostle, who was afraid of rustling leaves so he went and hanged himself; and finally that father of all lies – Satan, the devil and most evil one, who parades as angel of light, but because of his usurpation and rebellion against the holy will of the living God is caught up and tied down in eternal death, hopeless vanity and nothingness. Whoever is not forgiven, remains bound in sin and will be cast out. He is lost in never ending suffering, pain and gnashing of teeth – and no hope whatsoever and no escape ever, never. Now that is a very long and most terrible suffering. So be warned oh man, to not land in this detriment by your hardness of heart and unwillingness to hear the warning shots of God!

In Galatia there were very pious and god-fearing people too, who wanted to be especially religious, faithful Jews and most law-abiding at that. They critiqued St. Paul, IX apostle, that he had but gone half-way and by his Christian freedom founded on Christ's gracious favour alone had given up the perfect gospel at the cost of losing circumcision and the perfect obedience of men. Something like Luther, who had only reformed the church half-way and not all the way out of catholic practises like those enthusiastic heavenly prophets, who proclaimed God's kingdom on earth – a very wishful communism and promising equality of all. Luther was rejected by those fanatics of worldly perfection, human righteousness and utopian freedom. In the end it is either or. Either you go with St.Paul and the gospel he's proclaimed or you're against him. Either your for Luther or not. And our Lord Jesus Christ himself says: *Whoever hears you, hears me and whoever rejects you, rejects him, who has sent me.* So it's just not an option to be sitting on the fence. You have to choose – am I going to trust St.Paul or not. Is Luther right or not? Lastly this is not just about this or that, but a question of the gospel of IX. Who do you say, I am? What do you think about Jesus? Do you trust the witness of the apostle and prophets? Or are you going to venture out into the unknown following some lofty dreams, hazy myths and/or ancient traditions of your fathers? Studying theology puts you out at sea. You're going to hear many things, read even more and will start to write this and that. Sometimes you will feel like sinking, so lift up your eyes and focus them on IX. He alone is the truth, the way and the light. Amen.