

Call Rather than Conversion

The questions in this file are based on pages 7—23 (section two) of the essay, “Paul among Jews and Gentiles” in Krister Stendahl’s book, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays*.¹

1. Regarding the biblical passages usually taken to be about Paul’s ‘conversion’, Stendahl writes:

. . . A CLOSER READING OF THESE ACCOUNTS. . . REVEALS A GREATER CONTINUITY BETWEEN “BEFORE” AND “AFTER.” HERE IS NOT THAT CHANGE OF “RELIGION” THAT WE COMMONLY ASSOCIATE WITH THE WORD *CONVERSION*. SERVING THE ONE AND THE SAME GOD, PAUL RECEIVES A NEW AND SPECIAL CALLING IN GOD’S SERVICE (p. 7).

What considerations bear on the distinction Stendahl is making between *conversion* and call? How are conversion and call different? Why does Stendahl think that the word *call* better reflects Paul’s experience than *conversion*?

2. On pages 10—11 Stendahl argues that even the passages in *Acts* which talk about Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus present that experience in terms of a prophetic *call* (Acts 9, 22, and 26). Stendahl writes, “BOTH GALATIANS AND ACTS REFLECT A SIMILAR TRADITION, NAMELY THAT OF A PROPHETIC CALL” (p. 10). What elements of the stories in Acts reflect the language of call. What has caused Stendahl to picture Paul’s experience in this way?
3. On page 11 Stendahl points out that in Acts the change of Paul’s name from *Saul* to *Paul* does not coincide with his experience on the road to Damascus, even though people often think it does. What does the name change really reflect in Acts?
4. On page 12 Stendahl writes

. . . WE ALL, IN THE WEST, AND ESPECIALLY IN THE TRADITION OF THE REFORMATION, CANNOT HELP READING PAUL THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF PERSONS LIKE LUTHER AND CALVIN.

In what ways have *Luther* and *Calvin* influenced our understanding of Paul? What elements from Paul’s own letters lead Stendahl to question the legitimacy of reading him as though he reflected the same struggles as Luther and Calvin?

¹ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortres Press, 1976), pages 1—77.

5. Paul freely admits that he was a sinner, but he only mentions one particular sin that he committed (though he clearly states that there were others). What is the one sin that Paul names specifically? Does he come to see this sin as a problem before, or after his experience of the risen Christ?
6. What part did *Augustine* play in setting the stage for the way of reading Paul that would become popular after Luther and Calvin? (See pages 16 and following.)
7. What does the word *paidagogos* mean in Galatians 3:24, according to Stendahl. Why is this important?
8. In Galatians 3:19 Paul begins a list of reasons for the Law, reasons which suggest that the Law cannot be the key to right relationship with God. Stendahl calls these “points which belittle the law” (p. 19). What are those reasons?
9. What are the consequences of viewing *paidagogos* as “custodian” rather than “schoolmaster”?