

Some Answered Questions, “Many Are Called, but Few Are Chosen”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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“Many Are Called, but Few Are Chosen”

Question: Christ says in the Gospel: “many are called, but few are chosen”, and in the Qur’án it is written: “He singleth out for His mercy whomsoever He pleaseth.” What is the wisdom of this?

Answer: Know that the order and perfection of the universe require that existence should appear in countless forms. Created things cannot therefore be realized in a single degree, station, manner, kind, or species: Differences of degree, distinctions in form, and a multiplicity of kinds and species are inevitable. So there must necessarily be mineral, vegetable, animal, and human kingdoms; for through man alone the world of existence could not be adequately arranged, adorned, organized, and perfected. By the same token, with the animals, plants, or minerals alone, this world would not possess such a wondrous appearance, sound arrangement, and subtle adornment: There must be differences of degrees and stations, of kinds and species, for existence to shine forth with the utmost perfection.

For example, if this tree were to become entirely fruit, the perfections of the vegetable kingdom could not be attained, for leaves, blossoms, and fruit are all needed for the tree to appear in the utmost beauty and perfection.

Consider likewise the body of man, which must of necessity be composed of different parts, limbs, and organs. The beauty and perfection of the human body require the existence of the ear, the eye, the brain, and even the nails and hair: If man were all brain, eyes, or ears, this would be tantamount to imperfection. So the absence of hair, eyelashes, teeth, and nails is imperfection itself, for even though in comparison with the eyes the latter are insentient and resemble the mineral and the plant, yet their absence in the body of man is most disagreeable and displeasing.



TRANSLATION

Now, so long as the degrees of created things are different, some will naturally rank above the others. Thus, since the election of certain creatures, such as man, for the highest degree; the maintenance of others, such as plants, in the middle degree; and the relegation of yet others, such as minerals, to the lowest degree are each and all due to the divine will and purpose, it follows that the singling out of man for the highest degree is through the grace of God, and that the differences among men with regard to spiritual attainments and heavenly perfections are likewise due to the choice of the All-Merciful. For faith, which is life eternal, is a token of grace and not the result of justice. The flame of the fire of love, in this world of earth and water, burns by the power of attraction and not through human effort and striving, although through the latter one may indeed acquire knowledge, learning, and other perfections. It is the light of the divine Beauty, then, that must stir up and move the spirit through its attractive power. Wherefore is it said: "many are called, but few are chosen".

As for material beings, they are not to be blamed, judged, or held accountable for their own degrees and stations. Thus the mineral, the plant, and the animal are each acceptable in their own degree, but if they were to remain deficient in that degree they would be blameworthy, the degree itself being wholly perfect.

Now, the differences among mankind are twofold: One is a difference of degree, and this difference is not blameworthy. The other is a difference with respect to faith and certitude, the absence of which is blameworthy; for the soul must have fallen prey to its own lusts and passions to have been deprived of this bounty and bereft of the attractive power of the love of God. However praiseworthy and acceptable it may be in its human degree, yet as it is deprived of the perfections of that degree, it has become a source of deficiency and is held accountable for that reason.