

Walking
in the
Light

Notes of prayer meeting addresses given by
Rev Hugh M. Cartwright



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Paul's calling

Galatians 1:15-17

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

28th August 2008

In this chapter and the next, Paul gives a long and very strong defence of his apostleship. It was very unusual for the apostle to talk about himself. 'We preach not ourselves,' he said, 'but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.' He saw himself as the chief of sinners, less than the least of all saints, and the least of the apostles. But here he is talking a lot about himself—his spiritual history, his call to be an apostle, and how his authority was from God (not even from other apostles, but from God).

Paul's Calling

He gives us here a little biographical information. We know from elsewhere that after his conversion, after he regained his eyesight, he remained in Damascus preaching to the Jews. Then things became difficult—the Jews sought to kill him, and he was let down the wall through a window in a basket, when soldiers under Aretus were sent to capture him.

Here he describes how he spent time among the Arabs (the descendants of Ishmael and Edom). After three years, he went to Jerusalem. So there were three years before he saw an apostle. He was given direct revelation from Jesus Christ, not from other apostles. He went up to Jerusalem after fourteen years just to confirm he was preaching what they were preaching.

He says all this, because there were some who were going among the churches of Galatia, preaching ‘another gospel.’ They weren’t so much denying Christ, or the necessity of faith in Christ—but they were adding to the gospel. They said that people also had to observe the rituals of the Old Testament dispensation. This was anathema to Paul. Adding anything to the gospel is denying the sufficiency of the Saviour. It is most dishonouring to God, and to the freeness of the gospel, and it is most damaging to souls.

These people were undermining Paul because they wanted to undermine his gospel. That’s why he is reinforcing his

authority as an apostle—because turning away from him and his gospel is turning away from God and the truth.

This truth is so central. We think of Luther at the Reformation—bringing people back to Christ, back to the truth—Christ alone for salvation.

1. The eternal purpose of God.
2. The effectual call of God.
3. God equipping Paul for the work he was called to.

1. The eternal purpose of God

It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen.

God's good pleasure was behind what happened when Paul was converted. He freely purposed that Paul would be a Christian and that Paul would be an apostle.

Here also we see the eternity of it. *From my mother's womb—before I was born—he set me apart, selected me, chose me.* This is a doctrine we find throughout scripture. In Romans we read of Jacob and Esau, 'the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth' (Romans 9:11). Jeremiah also was chosen before he was born.

This was true not only of Paul and the other apostles—it is true of all the Lord's people. They can all trace what God has done in them or given to them back to his eternal purpose. Nothing is due to works of righteousness which we have done. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He mapped out all the path they were to take. Paul's father and mother, his early experiences, the sphere he worked in. Nobody could understand the mind of the self-righteous Pharisee, or the heretic in Galatia, like Paul could—based on his own experience. Of course it was his sin that he lived so long without faith and repentance, but in the providence of the Lord, even that experience contributed to equipping him for the eventual work the Lord had for him to do.

2. The effectual call of God

God ... called me by his grace. Who would ever have thought that Saul of Tarsus would become a Christian? He had had contact with the gospel. He had been reading the Old Testament Scriptures since he was a boy in school—yet he didn't see Christ. He didn't come to faith, didn't come to repentance. He was a witness at Stephen's death—that didn't convert him. When he was haling the Lord's people to prison, seeing and hearing their witness—that didn't convert him, although it was working on his conscience.

What made the difference? *God called me by his grace.* The same grace that chose me from eternity persuaded and enabled me to close in with Christ. He convinced me of my sin and misery, enlightened my mind in the knowledge of Christ, and renewed my will.

He called me by his grace. This is the beginning of life in any soul—the Holy Spirit working in the soul, overcoming the hesitations, overcoming the reluctance. If there is any inclination toward Christ in my heart at all, it is the product of his grace. Before Paul was an apostle, he was a Christian, and all the Lord’s people have this in common. Words that used to mean nothing to them now become powerful and meaningful in their experience.

God *revealed his Son in me.* He reveals Christ internally. It’s in the Scriptures that we learn about Christ. We learn nothing about Christ that’s not in the Scriptures. But that revelation has to get into our minds and hearts and take hold of our wills. ‘It pleased God, who called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me’—to make Christ known as a reality to me.

This is a matter that concerns the Lord’s people—to have Christ in us, in our mind, heart, soul. To have a personal acquaintance with Christ, so that Christ—the Christ of the Bible—becomes a reality to us, and we depend on him to deliver us from sin and from evil.

3. God equipping him for the work he was called to

... that I might preach him among the heathen. God was calling Paul to the work of preaching Christ to others. He couldn't preach a Christ he didn't know himself. Paul was as much an eyewitness as any of the other apostles. And Paul had a compulsion to preach.

God equipped him by revealing Christ to him such that he got the capacity to preach him to others. He was converted not for his own sake. There is a parallel here when people are called to the ministry. It's very different in some ways, of course—people don't normally go into the desert when they're called to the ministry. But Christ is revealed to them in such a way that they have a compulsion to preach him to others. Every Christian feels this to some extent, but there is something beyond that when the Lord reveals himself in a way that they feel constrained to preach the gospel.

Still, all the Lord's people feel the desire to show forth the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. He doesn't reveal himself to us so that we would just have him for ourselves—but to show forth his praises. We're not saved to only find satisfaction in Christ for ourselves—but to glorify God, and to seek the good of our fellow sinners.

Conclusion

We see here God's dealings with all his people. He sets them apart, he calls them effectually, and he makes Christ known to them in a way that they will be able to live a life glorifying to him.

Do we know anything of this calling by grace? Is the Word of God beginning to speak to us in a way that makes it become real to us? If so, we can trace that back to the sovereign grace of God—and follow it on. Why was I called by grace? So that, whether I eat, or drink or whatever I do, it would be to the glory of God.

Righteousness does not come by the law

Galatians 2:21

I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

4th September 2008

The epistle to the Galatians was written to counteract a heresy that was springing up—the idea that we need to add the works of the law to faith. The ceremonial law no doubt is especially in view, but *anything* added is a dishonour to Christ and his work.

Here Paul mentions an incident with Peter. Peter preached the same gospel as Paul—free grace, not by works of righteousness that we have done. But, contrary to his own principles and contrary to his own previous practice, when some Jews came from Jerusalem, Peter withdrew and separated himself. When the apostles were speaking in the Lord's name, they were inspired—there is no error in anything they said or wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But Paul saw in what Peter did here an undermining of his doctrine. So he spoke to him very

Righteousness does not come by the law

strongly. This verse is the last of what he said to Peter. By his actions Peter was frustrating the grace of God—it's the grace of God and the death of Christ which constitute the basis of the righteousness of the people of God.

1. The notion which Paul is controverting—that righteousness comes by the law.
2. Unlike this notion, Paul's gospel did not frustrate the grace of God.
3. Unlike this notion, Paul's gospel does not make out that the death of Christ was in vain.
4. Unlike this notion, Paul's gospel did promote holiness.

1. The notion that righteousness comes by the law

The people Paul was writing against probably didn't deny that the death of Christ was necessary for salvation, or that salvation came from grace. But they were saying that something *further* was necessary—that you had to live according to the law if you were to be righteous in God's eyes.

This is a doctrine that finds ready acceptance in our hearts. Because whatever place we give to grace or to Christ, we still tend to think that we need something of our own. We may theoretically deny it, but so often we are acting practically or partially as if we believe it—as if we needed to bring something of our own to add to Christ. We become so cast down when we discover our sinful actions

and thoughts and feelings—and often that’s because we’re giving some place to our actions and feelings. Works *are necessary*—but as *fruits*—they’re not at all to be incorporated in our hope for eternity. But believers are concerned to live a life in conformity to the law of God—so much so, that they are in danger of slipping it in beside Christ as part of the ground of our righteousness.

2. Paul’s gospel does not frustrate the grace of God

The notion that righteousness comes by the law frustrates the grace of God. This notion doesn’t give the grace of God its place—it treats it as not sufficient for the salvation of sinners.

But the gospel emphasises that by *grace* are ye saved. Salvation is by the free, spontaneous, unmerited kindness of God. It is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God—without any merit on our part.

We’re always trying to contribute something to salvation. We always think, ‘I have to do *something* myself.’ But supposing we admit that a large part of our debt needs to be paid—yet if we’re wanting to contribute *anything*, we’re *taking away* from the gift of the benefactor. Grace can’t do 95% and we’ll somehow contribute the 5%. How can we buy with our farthing what cost thousands of talents of gold? But even if we’re *trying*, we’re frustrating the grace of God. Grace must do 100%.

Righteousness does not come by the law

3. Paul's gospel does not make the death of Christ to be in vain

And why did Christ die, if works of ours can contribute? This notion makes the death of Christ at best a platform that we can build our own works on. If we're putting *any* confidence in our own works, we're saying in effect that the death of Christ is not what it claims to be—that the blood of Jesus Christ does not cleanse us from all sin. We're making out the death of Christ to be in effect an empty thing—with no real meaning, no real effect. The Bible says that the death of Christ finished transgression, made an end of sin, brought in everlasting righteousness, secured the deliverance of his people from *all* their guilt. And now here comes a person who says it's not enough!

Paul was teaching instead a doctrine that puts the death of Christ at the very centre. Everything the sinner needs is to be found in Christ crucified. We can have no confidence in our own thoughts, feelings, works. Christ's death *was* necessary—and not only necessary, but successful, as his resurrection demonstrates.

4. Paul's gospel promotes holiness

In the context of this epistle, people were saying that righteousness comes by the law because they thought that a person relying on grace and not works would be careless about their life and at ease in sin.

But Paul is very indignant at that idea. It was abhorrent to the apostle Paul. No doubt there are some who abuse the doctrines of grace—they think they're saved by grace so they don't care how they live. But that's not the effect of the doctrine—that's the abuse of the doctrine.

'If, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God' (verses 17-19).

Paul is saying that the faith that comes from the work of the Spirit identifies him with Christ crucified. It gives him the same concern as Christ had in going to the cross—to save us from sin—for the destruction of sin and the power of sin. Faith is not a mere intellectual reception of doctrines—instead, believers have 'the mind of Christ.' They live by the resources provided in Christ. You remember what happened with Thomas Chalmers. Before his conversion he preached morality, and it left his parish as immoral as before. But when a person receives the truth, and has that union with Christ, and is drawing on the resources in Christ, that makes holiness inevitable, and gives the motive, in seeing Christ who gave himself for them.

Righteousness does not come by the law

Conclusion

How should a man be just with God? We need to beware of the self-righteousness which Paul was exposing and condemning here. We need to realise our absolute dependence on the grace of God and the death of Christ. Here is the key to a life of holiness.