

Paul and Conversion

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- [0 : 00] The third subject in the life and work of the Apostle Paul, I have entitled Paul and Conversion.
- Please turn in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 1, verses 15 and 16, which are the focus of these studies. We have considered the words, but when it pleased God to set me apart from my mother's womb.
- Now it is not enough to be set apart from birth. That alone will not bring us to heaven. There must be a change in our hearts, in our lives, in our experience.
- We have no reason to think that we have been set apart until this change has taken place. The change is the evidence that we are those who have been set apart.
- And this change will take place in all whom God thus sets apart, in all of God's people.
- [1 : 24] Such a change will take place, as we know, in Saul of Tarsus. It was a very definite change and a very pronounced one.
- His life was turned around. He was a new being. The question for all of us here is, have I been changed by the power of God?
- It's a question for us old people, young people, and children, boys and girls. Have you been changed by the power of God?
- Do you know that God has done something great in your life and made you a new person? Now our experience, as we'll see this evening, doesn't need to be a copy of Paul's experience.
- But there must be a deep, radical change. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.
- [2 : 31] But how does this change come about? The apostle doesn't give us a full description of it here, but he uses two phrases to give us a partial description of it.
- God calls and God reveals. And we want to consider the first of these phrases this morning. God called me by his grace.

God called me by his grace. at this point you may be thinking that the title Paul and Conversion is something of a misnomer because admittedly in the language of systematic theology God's call is not the same thing as conversion strictly speaking God's call is the work of God in the human heart which precedes conversion and which results in conversion but in fact in biblical theology calling is a very rich and wide concept and it includes much of what is involved in conversion and while in systematic theology we have to break these truths down into their component parts to study them and understand them the dividing lines in scripture are not always so clearly drawn it's interesting to note for example that many of the 17th century theologians identified calling or effectual calling as they called it with the new birth they taught that they were one and the same thing and they cited Romans chapter 8 verse 30 those he predestined he also called those he called he also justified the shorter catechism has a magnificently comprehensive and biblical definition of this calling effectual calling and I would say that if any of you men are looking for a sermon series there are at least nine or ten sermons in that definition the catechism says effectual calling is the work of God's spirit whereby convincing us of our sin and misery enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ in the world and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel so calling is an enormously rich and deep term the theological word book of the New Testament which we call kibble for short describes calling as quote a technical term for the process of salvation

God called me by his grace and although Paul was called in a very unusual way every believer is called and we can immediately and without hesitation apply these words to ourselves as Paul was called by God's grace so we are called by God's grace in fact if you look at verse 6 of this chapter you will see that he uses an almost an almost identical expression of the Galatian Christians I am astonished he writes that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ just as he was called by grace so they were called by grace and in fact in the New Testament Christians are often described simply as the called ones Romans chapter 1 verse 6 says that he was called by grace and in fact in the New Testament Christians are often described simply as the called ones Romans chapter 1 verse 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ and what I want to do this morning is to note with you five points concerning God's call

God's call and in the first place we look at the sovereignty of God's call the sovereignty of God's call and that sovereignty is seen in two aspects authority and initiative God's call is sovereign in its authority in classical Greek the verb to call was often used of an official summons by a recognized authority you could be called to serve in the army called by the general you could be called to appear before the city assembly an official summons and we find the same usage in the old testament in the Hebrew verb to call it is the call usually of a higher being to someone lower in rank parents call their children rulers call their people call has authority in it it's never just a mere invitation there's always the idea of command it's from a king to his subject to his subject to his subject who are bound to obey him and God's call to men is like that it is a summons from our sovereign and I think we need to remember that we are preachers and all of us who are witnesses need to seek to reflect the authority of God's call called when we bring it to other people. This is not a weak, feeble, well-meaning, wistful suggestion from God. That's the way it's sometimes presented. We had a master at school who just couldn't keep order and he used to stand bleating in the middle of the class.

[9 : 27] Now boys, now boys, come on boys. Nobody paid the slightest attention to him. He just called and called. We paid no attention. I'm ashamed to say. God's call isn't like that. God isn't whimpering. God isn't bleating at us. God isn't pleading with us in that sense. It is a mighty, sovereign command. A command with authority. When God spoke on the road to Damascus, saw call of Tarsus stopped dead in his tracks because he recognized the authority of that mighty voice.

God's call is sovereign in its authority. Secondly, God's call is sovereign in its initiative. I mean by that it is sovereign in that the initiative is entirely with God. He calls because he chooses to call. The process originates with him. It proceeds from him. Man has absolutely no place whatsoever in the issuing of the call of God. Romans chapter 8 verse 28. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called. And how have they been called? On what basis?

According to his purpose. It's a very clear statement of the sovereign initiative of God. According to his purpose.

And you will remember that in all things. And you will remember that in all things. And you will remember that that is amplified in the next chapter of Romans. Chapter 9 verses 11 and 12. Where the apostle is discussing the choice of Jacob instead of Esau.

Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad. In order that God's purpose in election might stand. Not by works.

[12 : 01] In order that God's purpose in the following. In order that God has done anything good or bad. The ultimate explanation of what happened to Paul is to be found with God. God was pleased to call him.

That's the beginning and indeed the end of the whole matter. Why was Saul converted? When he was converted? Where he was converted?

How he was converted? The initiative was God's throughout. He called. He called. Authoritatively and sovereignly. Let me pause at this point to make two practical applications of this truth.

Linking up with this morning's earlier study. It should surely lead us to greater prayerfulness. Since the initiative in salvation is with God.

It is to God that we must look in seeking the conversion of others. We may be concerned for the conversion of some who are present at this conference.

[13 : 04] In our churches. In our families. In our circle of friends and acquaintances. The great question is this. Will God be pleased to call them?

Will God be pleased to call them? If God will call them. Then they will be saved. If God will call them. Then they will come into the kingdom.

We must plead with God to call them. Now it's right that we should think about how we can present the gospel to people. How we can influence people.

How we can bring them to hear the truth. And communicate that truth to them. That's proper. It's necessary. We'll be thinking about it God willing tomorrow afternoon. But we must never forget that in the final analysis.

It is the Lord who will call them to salvation. Prayerfulness. And secondly this truth should produce in us great hopefulness.

[14 : 03] Great hopefulness and optimism. As we look at some people. We could feel discouraged. Intensely discouraged. We long for their salvation.

They seem so utterly indifferent. So careless. So hardened. So deaf. To all our entreaties and appeals.

And we look at them and we say there is no hope for that person. But what's the key factor? The key factor is God's call. And you see it may very well be God's purpose.

To call the most difficult, hardened, disinterested person you know. And if he should call them. They will be brought to him.

Inevitably. How many believers were expecting the conversion of Saul of Tarsus? The conversion of Saul of Tarsus. I don't think many were.

- [15 : 04] When he tried to join the church later on. They were so staggered and astonished and disbelieving. They didn't want to let him in. Possibly they would have said if there is one person in the face of this earth.
- Who will never be converted. Never. It's Saul of Tarsus. Our greatest enemy. But friends. God called him. God called him. And when God called him. He was converted.
- And we who hold to this biblical faith. Should be the most hopeful. And the most optimistic. You look at the most degraded, hopeless specimen of humanity. You may be looking at one of the elect of God. For the most optimistic.
- You look at the most degraded, hopeless specimen of humanity. You may be looking at one of the elect of God. For all we know. And we should be the most active in missionary endeavor.
- And in evangelism. For what matters. Is God's call. And it's tremendously encouraging. To know that the initiative. Is with a loving God.
- [16 : 07] Who delights in mercy. The sovereignty of God's call. Let us think in the second place. Of the blessing of God's call.
- The blessing of God's call. Now most authoritative calls. Are not particularly welcome. At home we don't like getting a brown envelope.
- It's usually from the government. We don't pick it up and say. Oh good. A letter from the government. We open it. With a sense of foreboding. The average small boy.
- If he hears his father calling. John. Come here at once. Doesn't say to himself. Oh good. Dad wants to speak to me. He starts going over his crimes in his mind.
- He thinks. Which one has come to light. What am I going to say. And when we hear an authoritative call. Our guilt. It makes us try to avoid that call.
- [17 : 10] And fear. One of the very striking features of this word. In classical Greek. And the New Testament Greek. Is it's warm. It's joy.
- It's privilege. It is a very very happy word. It's a happy word. Let me quote some biblical evidence.
- It's commonly used for example. In the New Testament. Of an invitation to a party. To a home. To a feast. Luke 14 16.
- And in each case that I quote here. The word call is used. It's not always so translated. In our modern versions. But it is always the word call. A certain man was preparing a great banquet.
- And he called many guests. It was an invitation. To a joyful banquet. Matthew 22 4. The parable of the wedding feast.
- [18 : 08] Tell those who have been called. That I have prepared my dinner. Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet. It was an invitation. To an occasion of joy.
- John chapter 2 verse 2. Jesus and his disciples. Have been called. To the wedding. So it is. Used in scripture.
- Of an invitation. To privilege. To joy. And to blessing. And such an invitation. Also. Conferred honor. On the person who was called.
- So that in the Bible. To be called. To be called. To be called. Means much the same. As to be chosen. To be chosen. To be an invited guest.
- So it also means to be chosen. To be honored. The church itself. Is the called out body.
- [19 : 05] That's what the Greek word. Ekklesia means. It means those people. Who are invited. Those people who are honored. Who are chosen.

Who are called. And some. In some. References in the New Testament. Called. And elect. Have almost the same meaning. So there's the idea.

Not only of privilege. But of honor. There's a further aspect. Of the meaning of the word. Which is implied. In another. Meaning of it. To call. Someone. Can be used.

Of parents. Naming a child. What are you going to call. Your child. And we call our children. We give them. Names. And. We give them. Names. And we call our children.

We give them. Names. And we call our children. We give them. Names. We give them. Names. And in doing that. We are. We are.

[20 : 00] Claiming them. Claiming them. For ours. We are expressing. Our authority. Over them. And we are claiming them. Adam.

Gave. A name. To the woman. He said. She shall be. Called woman. He called her Eve. He was claiming her.

For himself. Adam. Adam. Called. The beasts. Of the field. He gave them. Their names. And in doing so. He was claiming them.

So we read. In Isaiah. Chapter 43. Verse 1. But now. This is what the Lord says. He who created you. O Jacob. He who formed you.

O Israel. Fear not. For I have redeemed you. I have called you. By name. You are mine. I have called you.

[20 : 56] By name. You are mine. I'm sure. Saul of Tarsus. Thought often. On that verse. And we should think. Often.

On that verse. I have called you. By name. You're mine. 1 John 3.2. How great is the love. The father.

Has lavished on us. That we should be called. Children of God. And that is what we are. So what a blessed word. What a happy.

Joyful word. In it. God invites to blessing. God chooses. God honors. God claims us. God says. As his own. The dictionary.

New Testament theology. Says to call. Is to speak to another. In order to bring him nearer. I like that definition. To speak to another.

[21 : 51] In order to bring him nearer. And this is. Supported. By the references to calling. In the New Testament.

And I give you just a few of them. Note the blessing. And the privilege. Of this calling. calling. Galatians 5.13 You my brothers were called to be free.

Called to be free. 1 Thessalonians 2.12 God who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

That's what we're called to. God's kingdom and glory. 2 Thessalonians 2.13 From the beginning God chose you to be saved.

He called you to this through our gospel. We're called to be saved. 1 Timothy 6.12 Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. Called to eternal life.

[22 : 55] And the passage referred to already this morning 1 Peter 2.9 That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So we're called you see to be free to God's kingdom. To God's glory. To be saved. To have eternal life. To enter into the light. And indeed as the early church preached the good news of Christ they used the word call to encompass all of God's saving work.

Acts 2.39 The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call.

The blessing of God's call. And friends it's vital for us to keep this in mind because by nature we're like that small boy who is being called by a spatter.

The thought of God's call inspires in us a degree of fear. And of course God's call to the sinner can involve distress and pain and it will.

[24 : 06] But it is a call to life and blessing. I wonder are there any young people or children here today and at this conference you've become aware that God is calling you.

God is speaking to you boys and girls. I would say to you don't be frightened of that call. Don't run away from that call.

It is a most loving and gracious father who is calling you to bless you to give you happiness to do great good to you.

The most wonderful thing which can ever happen to anyone is to be called by God. There was once a blind man called Bartimaeus and people came to him in his blindness Mark 10.49 and they said be of good cheer rise up he is calling you.

The blessing of God's call. And the third place we want to look at the particularity of God's call.

[25 : 31] The particularity of God's call. Now there is of course what is called a general call of God. That call is extended to every person who hears the message of the gospel.

And the scriptures speak of that general call. That universal call. In the parable of the wedding banquet many were invited.

not all of those invited accepted the invitation. And Christ comments many are called but few are chosen.

That's God's general call. But what Paul is referring to here is a more particular call. Effectual call. A powerful saving effective call.

And friends this call is not general. This call is extremely specific. God called me.

[26 : 35] God called me. As he was traveling along the Damascus road and the voice came from heaven the voice did not say is there anyone there who would be interested in receiving Christ as their savior?

The voice said Saul. Saul in his mother tongue. The tongue that would speak to his heart.

The tongue that would mean so much to him. Using his very name. Nothing could have been more personal more specific more particular.

At that moment no one else in all the world was being addressed. No one else was being included. It was a one to one encounter as God called Saul by name.

The echo of that call rang in his heart ever after God called me. Now I think it's important to stress this because there's a widespread impression that the reformed faith is somehow anti-man.

[28 : 02] The impression is something like this that the humanists give great place and importance to man as of course they do.

and Arminians lay great stress on man's abilities man's powers and man's responsibilities as of course they do.

But then against those people set their reformed faith and say their reformed faith is so obsessed with an almighty God that men and women are just obscure anonymous nothings worms of the dust man is lost altogether we're told in their reformed faith in the vision of God.

People turn to these things because they feel that this gives greater place to man. Now in a sense that's true but in the ultimate sense nothing could be further from the truth.

we do believe in a God who is infinitely great. We know that human beings are dead and helpless in their sin.

[29 : 20] But I say to you my friends that the reformed faith gives to these wretched chosen sinners a value and a dignity and a place through God's mercy which no other teaching on this earth can even begin to approach.

Popular evangelicalism teaches that God loved the mass of humanity indiscriminately. That Christ died for the mass of humanity indiscriminately.

And that God now calls the mass of humanity indiscriminately to himself and he waits and hopes that somewhere some people will respond to his call.

The Bible teaches on the other hand that in eternity before the world was made God set his love on certain individuals.

Certain individuals. He knew them. He loved them. He chose them to be his. And God purposed to save those people whose names he knew.

[30 : 44] And that in time God came to earth, God the Son, and he came on behalf of those people to save his people from their sins.

And he kept the law for those people. And he hung on the cross for those people. Knowing them, loving them, identifying them, and that God the Holy Spirit applies to these self-same individuals the redemption purchased by Christ.

Now if that isn't a dignity, if that isn't a glory for us, if that isn't something to make us lift our heads, chosen, chosen in eternity, by God, loved by Christ, me, God called me.

It's a stupendous thought. It's an awesome thought. Paul knew very well his own unworthiness and yet he could say elsewhere, the Son of God who loved me, me, and gave himself for me, me.

There is a holy egotism. We have the right to say God cares about me. God has loved me since the beginning of the world.

[32 : 14] Jesus died for me on the cross for he's told us that. What does it mean for us to realize that the eternal infinite God is speaking to us by name, speaking to you and to me, using your name in its most familiar version, calling you to meet with himself.

Here is a great part of our security and of the wonder of our salvation. God called me. And every Christian can say the particularity of God's call.

fourthly, we look at the reason for God's call. The reason for God's call. Now, some individuals wouldn't be in the least surprised that God would speak to them.

It would seem to them entirely natural and understandable. They are full of themselves. They almost suggest that they are doing God a favor by listening.

I remember a man saying to me, I come along to church because I like to support the church. I thought poor church to have such support.

[33 : 36] I remember again at school, you'll think I had a very exciting school days, but I remember someone coming to speak to us and he began by saying, now boys and girls, I want you to treat me as if I were just an ordinary person.

And in our childish ignorance, we had thought he was an ordinary person. Very, very ordinary.

Now there are people like that. And their pride is fed today. Their pride is fed by evangelists who portray the Lord as a pitiable figure, pleading, weeping, for their attention.

Now Paul wasn't like that, ever, after his conversion, nor is any healthy believer. It was an astounding shock to him when he thought about it that God ever should have called him.

He was amazed at it. And the more he thought about it, the more amazed he became. It was a marvel to him. To the day of his death, God called me.

[34 : 49] Remember what he says in 1 Corinthians 15. 10, I am the least of the apostles, and do not even deserve to be called an apostle.

He describes himself as less than the least of all saints. Now that's an expression that could have been coined by an Irish man.

It is a grammatical and logical impossibility. There is no such word in Greek. Paul makes it up. This is the only time as far as I know that it ever occurs ever in the whole history of the Greek language.

If something is the least, you cannot have less than the least by definition. But Paul says you can. You can.

Imagine the least and I am less than the least. One writer says he invents a comparative formed as a superlative to express the deepest self-abasement.

[35 : 51] And Paul had reason for such self-assessment. Remember that he gave approval to Stephen's death. We read in Acts 8.3 that he made havoc of the church.

And that word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament of the ravaging activity of a boar. the picture is of Saul as a wild boar with his tusks grunting and snorting and routing at the body of the church trying to turn it into a lump of bloody meat.

That was Saul furiously charging at the church like a wild boar making havoc of it. We're told that he went from house to house. He dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

We're told that he breathed out murderous threats. He says I persecuted the followers of this way to their death.

There's a magnificent series of statements in Acts chapter 26. Perhaps I could just move aside for a moment from our main study to say a word to the pastors here to encourage you to study your Greek New Testaments.

[37 : 12] In Acts 26 verse 10 we have three coordinate verbs. I put many of the saints to death. I cast my vote against them.

And then in verse 11 I tried to force them to blaspheme. The first two verbs are in the aorist tense and the third verb is in the imperfect tense. Paul changes the tense.

Now why does he change the tense? Because in Greek the aorist tense is a definite completed action. I cast them in prison.

He did that. I cast my vote against them. He did that. But when he comes to say I forced them to blaspheme he couldn't say it.

He couldn't say it. He has to change the tense to what we call a conative imperfect. It's well translated in the new international. I tried to force them to blaspheme.

[38 : 25] Just in that little change of tense in Greek grammar you can see a host of brave nameless Jewish martyrs who stood in that court and would not blaspheme their Lord and Savior to the death.

I could throw them in prison. I could condemn them to death but there's one thing I couldn't do. I couldn't make them blaspheme their Savior. This is the sort of man he was.

He says in 1 Timothy 1 13 I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man. Now what reason could God have for calling such a man?

Certainly nothing in Paul himself couldn't have been. There's only one reason God called me by his grace.

By his grace. That's the only explanation he says I can find. As I look in my own heart I can only see sin and vileness and unworthiness.

[39 : 31] I can see no reason why God should have called me and every reason why he should have condemned me. So why did he call me? He called me because of his own grace.

Because of a sovereign outflow of mercy to someone who deserved the opposite. And as gladly as he rejoiced in God's salvation Paul never forgot what he'd been.

And he never for a moment ceased to marvel at God's grace towards him. We were thinking of it last night. He saw himself as an example and an encouragement to others.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief but for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me the worst of sinners Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example.

By the grace of God I am what I am. The reason for God's call friends is found solely and exclusively in God himself in his grace.

[40 : 44] In his almighty grace. grace. And surely that's humbling. Because what's true of Paul is true of every single believer.

And let us never for a moment forget it and let it guide all our living. He called me just by his grace. And it's encouraging for it tells us that there's mercy in Christ for the worst.

mercy for the vilest. For the most unworthy. For you and for me. And really I would say to you that it is only as we understand grace that we can understand Paul.

And there's many an old woman, an old saint in our churches who doesn't know anything about New Testament background or Greek exegesis or church history or any of those things. But she knows the grace of God in her own soul.

And I say to you that she's a far better understanding of Paul and of his theology than some of these great scholars with all their learning. James Denny once wrote to Alexander White, the unintelligent and inexperienced books about Paul are dreadful.

[42 : 06] All done by just men who need no repentance and therefore have no glimmering of what was vital to the apostle. The grace of God.

There's a magnificent statement also from J.S. Stewart. I apologize to the rest of you for quoting so many Scots men in these talks. honesty compels me to admit that they have more to say of value about Paul than most other nationalities I've come across.

But Stewart is a book, A Man in Christ, which is a variable book, but he's many fine things in it. I think this paragraph is wonderful. He's talking about people who can't understand Paul.

Here's what he says. Those who have never been driven to the point of seeing that their own achievements are nothing. and God's grace everything.

Those who have not realized the subtle desperate hold that self lays upon the soul, making its very piety a barrier to Christ and its morality an offense in God's sight.

[43 : 22] Those who have never stared into the eyes of moral defeat, they exclude themselves from the inmost shrine of the apostles' mind and soul.

Have you ever realized the subtle desperate hold that self lays on the soul? Have you ever thought that your very piety could be a barrier to Christ?

Isn't that a fearful thing? That we could be on our knees actually insulating ourselves from God? Actually building a self-righteous wall between ourselves and God?

Paul's piety was a barrier to Christ. His morality was an offense in God's sight because he relied on it and he boasted in it and he made it an ugly thing.

So to understand Paul, we need to be broken, we need to be humbled and we need to love and trust in grace. And then whether we're learned or whether we're not learned, Paul lets us right into his heart and we can feel the man and know the man.

[44 : 42] Then lastly, the means of God's call. the means of God's call. Grace is not only the reason why God calls sinners to himself, grace is the instrument which God uses to bring them.

And strictly speaking, that is the main meaning of this phrase, by his grace. The Greek preposition is *dia*, with the genitive case through or by means of, the New King James version translates it through his grace.

I better quote a Dutch man. Herman Ritterbos says, not only the motive of God's calling was grace, but the means of God's calling was grace.

He called him out of grace, but he also called him by grace. God summoned Paul to himself by an outflow of mercy and kindness.

You must have noted what is perhaps most striking and moving about the encounter on the Damascus road. The gentleness.

[46 : 06] The gentleness with which the Lord lays his hand upon this man. here's a bloodstained murderer. Here's the ravager of Christ's people.

And yet what is said? Saul, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Friends, that's all he said. That's all he said. A mate, what would you or I have said?

No thunder? No denunciation? Just the piercing sword of the graciousness of the Savior. Not one direct word of reproach wasn't necessary.

As soon as this man saw Jesus, he was his own accuser, his own prosecuting counsel. And Saul was captured forever by the God who spoke like this to his enemy.

[47 : 19] Christ's love, he wrote, compels us. Now, don't mistake what I'm saying. Of course, an important place must always be given to preaching God's wrath against sin and God's wrath against sinners and the fierceness of God's judgment and the terrors of hell.

And I know and agree with you that that is neglected today, criminally, inexcusably neglected. And this law work, so-called, is vital in true conversion and it is vital for spiritual health afterwards.

And it is true that there are many who are saved chiefly because they are moved to flee from the wrath to come.

That's how I was converted myself and I was speaking to someone else yesterday who was converted from exactly the same motive. But I think it's also true to say that what draws us and keeps us is almost invariably God's grace.

What is it that breaks our hearts? It's God's patience, isn't it? God's loving kindness, his tender mercy. What is it that overwhelms us with guilt?

[48 : 41] It's God's grace. What is it that encourages us to come? It's God's grace. This holy, this almighty God whom we have so grievously offended, who might justly destroy us and cast us from his presence.

Nevertheless, he so loved us that he sent his only begotten son to the cross that we might be saved. And he comes to us in mercy.

And he offers to us full forgiveness and life everlasting. This is what draws us. This is what draws us. God's grace. It's a little phrase in the catechism's definition of repentance unto life, which people often overlook when they're teaching on repentance.

A sinner comes, we're told, out of a true sense of his sin and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.

Both together. True sense of sin and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. I remember when I was a small boy, getting an extraordinary Christmas present.

[49 : 59] We were a poor family, we didn't have much money, and one year my father bought for me a plane that would fly. Very, very primitive thing. It was made out of plastic, the wings went round and round, and there was a long string and a stick, and my little sister and I went out into the street on Christmas morning with this expensive present.

And she held the plane, and I went down with the stick, and I told her to throw it up into the air, and she did it wrong. And in five minutes, five minutes after I unwrapped that toy, the plane was a tangled mess of string.

And I still remember, I can't have been more than six or seven, I still remember the frenzy and the mounting panic and terror with which I tried to untangle that miserable string.

this expensive toy. I knew my father had sacrificed to give it to me. I'd had it for five minutes, and I'd broken it. What was I going to say?

And I must have worked at it for an hour, on the verge of tears. What was he going to say? And eventually I gave up, and I took this thing home.

[51 : 12] And I opened the door, and I said, Dad, I'm really sorry. Look what happened. He wasn't angry.

He wasn't angry. He saw how frightened I was, and how sorry I was. He said, right, son, let's see if we can fix it.

And I just felt a surge of love in my heart from a father. he wasn't angry. Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

And it just broke Saul. It just broke him. And that's what brings the backsliding believer back to God in penitence.

A realization of God's graciousness, and God's patience, which he has been abusing. I've always been struck by the experience of Peter.

[52 : 19] You remember he denied the Lord three times in the judgment hall of Pilate, and we're told the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.

Didn't say anything. Just looked at him. Peter went out and wept bitterly. great, strong, tough, hard man.

Now what do you think made that man go out into the darkness and burst into tears and stand there and cry and cry as if his heart was breaking?

What was there in the look of Christ, do you think, that broke Peter's heart? Do you think it was the anger? Do you think it was the disappointment? No, I don't think so.

I think it was the love that he saw in Jesus' face. He just turned around and, oh Simon, I love you. Peter looked at him and he couldn't stand it.

[53 : 21] Couldn't stand it. And he went out, a broken hearted man. It was the love of Jesus which broke his heart. God called me.

How did he call me? He called me by his grace. And friends, he's calling us today. That's the glad thing. That's the wonderful thing. We're not at the day of judgment.

We're not standing before the throne. This great God comes into our midst today and he calls you by your name. He calls you in grace and in mercy.

He says, son, come here. Daughter, come here. His arms are open. His heart's open. He calls us to bring us near.

He calls us to peace and freedom and light and life and glory. If you can think of that call today and reject it, there's something desperately wrong with your heart.

[54 : 28] God called me by his grace. Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Oh, Lord, you who are God in heaven, radiant, perfect in holiness, these truths are almost too wonderful for us to grasp or to bear.

Oh, God, we are overwhelmed by them. these words what an unutterable reality they speak to us Heavenly Father shine into our souls by your spirit help us each one to know that in this moment the Father's voice is calling Lord we may be like that prodigal here today who when he was yet a long way off his Father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him O Father take away fear help us to come help us to come in Christ find your grace and mercy in Jesus name we ask it Amen