

Bible Basics Conference 2009: "Walk Worthy of the Calling!"

Part 5

Speaker	Bible Basics Conference; Simon Attwood; Michael Hardt; Graham Warnes; Hugh Clark; Paul Dronsfield; Andrew Poots
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[00:00:01] We can just start with the afternoon meetings with prayer, and then come to the questions. Our God and Father, we give thanks again for the time we have spent together already. We give thanks for this marvellous Gischwister, that is the subject of this conference, and that our hearts have been inviting a good matter this morning, considering by purpose and the way in which it was brought into effect. We would also trust that there will be a rich blessing this afternoon. We again pray for help in the presentation of the Scriptures, and also in answering any questions.

And we do pray that all those who have questions, that they might find a good answer. And we might all be encouraged as we go from here to seek these things out further, [00:01:07] for the glory of the Lord Jesus. Amen. A good use has been made of the question box. There are quite a number.

The first one is for Ronty.

Israel was near, and the Gentiles were far off.

Now we are near. Does that mean we are Israel now?

Scripture makes a clear distinction between Israel and the Church of God.

[00:02:02] So the first Corinthians in chapter 10, verse 32, the Apostle writes, Give none thanks, neither to the Jews, that is Israel, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God. So they are the three groups which are back in the Scripture. The Jews, the Gentiles, and then distinguishing the both is the Church of God. And whenever Israel is spoken of in the New Testament, it always refers to Israel, the nation. I'll give you an example in Romans, which is a very clear example.

Romans chapter 10, the Apostle says, Brethren, he's speaking of his brethren, those who are in the Church of God, Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. [00:03:05] So Israel as a nation is unregenerate. It is still Israel, as distinct from the Church of God. So the Church of God has not become Israel. Maybe there is a thought in the question of a verse at the end of Galatians, which speaks of the Israel of God, where Paul in Galatians has been showing the believers that they are to walk according to the spirit of grace.

They are not under the law, neither as a means of salvation, nor as a means of pleasing or being accepted by God. That it is all of grace. The law has been set aside. And he says, as many as walk according to this rule or this principle, peace be on them and mercy and, he says in addition, and upon the Israel of God. [00:04:09] So there I would suggest the Israel of God are those Jews who have believed in the truth.

They have turned away from the law as a means of salvation. And they put their trust in the Lord Jesus and they are trusting in him for salvation. They walk according to that rule and they are a faithful remnant, a faithful Israelite remnant, even at this time. Because we know that as Paul teaches in Romans, there is always a remnant for God in Israel. But that remnant, they are in the church, they are Christians, even though they are still Israelites. So in that sense they would be the Israel of God. But they are in the church, they are Christians and the church is not Israel. [00:05:03] Thank you very much. Now the next question is for Paul Dronsfield.

Please explain briefly the prophets in the New Testament and some names or give some names. If we turn to Ephesians in chapter 4.

I am not going to say too much on this because this will be spoken of anyway later on. I am sure a much clearer expression will be given. But we read of the Lord Jesus.

When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. And then verse 11.

And these are the gifts that he gave. He gave some apostles, that means he gave a number of apostles. And some prophets, a number of prophets. [00:06:02] Some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. So these prophets were given after the Lord had ascended up on high. After the church had been established upon earth by his spirit. These apostles were given and prophets were given. In order that the church might be edified and built up in their most holy faith. And that they might come into the knowledge of the truth. Because a prophet primarily is one who simply communicates the mind of God.

And these New Testament prophets that were given these gifts. They communicated truth which had not been revealed previously from God. Truth which was not known in Old Testament times. Now that the Lord has ascended in heaven. They would teach the truth concerning him. [00:07:02] All the things concerning himself. And of God's purpose in Christ. And of the mystery.

These things we brought out by the prophets and the apostles. And we can name some.

We have in Acts.

Acts 13.

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch. Certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and Simeon. That was called Niger. And Lucius of Cyrene and Menaion. Which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul. There is no distinction between whether they are teachers or prophets there. But nevertheless there must have been some there who were prophets. We also get Agabus in Acts. Who prophesied to Paul. In regard to the fact that he would be made a prisoner if he went to Rome. These prophets have given verbal prophecies.

[00:08:05] But we also have written revelation.

Which we have in the word of God. And I would suggest that Luke was a prophet.

Mark was a prophet.

James was a prophet. Jude was a prophet.

And we have their prophetic written ministry. Because they communicated the mind of God. They were inspired by God to do so. Thank you.

Would you like a break or just stay here? We then had a question also on chapter 2, verse 8.

Where it says, made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ.

[00:09:06] Another question on this. We feel very much on earth.

So what does this mean? And as Mark has rightly guessed, it's for him. In answering this question, it may just be helpful to make one or two remarks about reading and understanding the Bible.

Sometimes in the Bible we have the same thing presented in different ways. To take one example, Romans refers to us in our past state as being without strength. Whereas in Ephesians it was something that's a little bit different. It says that we're dead. So sometimes we have the same thing presented in different ways. Sometimes we also have two things presented, two different things that are both true at the same time. [00:10:07] And that's perhaps the best approach to take to answering this question and understanding verse 8. The short answer is that we are both on earth and in heavenly places. Just to again go back to the Old Testament and the history of Israel, which may help us with this. Israel was in the wilderness after they'd been taken through the Red Sea. They were in the wilderness. Then they moved into the land where they began to enjoy God's blessings. For us, we are seated in the heavenly places.

That's what Ephesians teaches us. So we are able, and in fact we do, enjoy the spiritual blessings which God has promised to us. [00:11:02] Obviously, we are still here on the earth. And so unlike Israel, who moved from the wilderness to the land, if you like, we are in both at the same time. We are still here on earth in the wilderness at the same time as being seated in heavenly places and being able to enjoy all that God has promised to us. The question used the phrase, we feel very much on earth.

Perhaps the answer to that statement about feeling is Colossians 3, verse 1, which instructs us to seek the things which are above.

We then had a question which says, why is there a prayer in the middle of the teaching? And I thought that's for Brother Hugh, but he thought it's for me. [00:12:11] But perhaps trying to give an answer to this, we might just look at the central request in that prayer, which I would suggest is in verse 18. I start in 17 for context. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Now, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.

For what purpose?

That you may know what is the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and the exceeding greatness of His power. [00:13:01] So, central point is, he prays that the eyes of the hearts of the Ephesians might be opened. And why did they need to be opened? Well, the reason was that they might know these three things, the calling, the inheritance, and the power. Now, why does that prayer come there? Well, first he has presented the calling and the inheritance. And now he says, well, that's a wonderful subject, but now I need to get on my knees and pray that everyone will take it in. That our eyes are opened and we actually start enjoying these things. That's also a picture from the Old Testament.

You know, the land was given to everyone, but you had two and a half tribes who said, actually, thanks, but no thanks. We're quite comfortable on the other side of Jordan. They didn't enjoy practically what they actually possessed. [00:14:04] And so, Paul kind of interrupts his teaching and says, now I need to pray that everybody enjoyed it. Now, then there was a question which says, it's about something that Mark said.

Do you want to read that or summarize it?

It's a longer question on Chapter 2, verse 8.

Yes, the question concerns Chapter 2, verses 8 and 9.

And in particular, the gift of God, grace, and faith.

[00:15:06] Whether, in particular, that faith is a gift of God.

The question refers to, which I won't read out in full, but it does refer to the original Greek and suggests that it's not possible for faith to be the gift of God.

Because in the original Greek, faith and gift, I think the question says, are of different genders. The person asking the question states that they believe that salvation is the gift of God. And then asks, if faith is the gift of God, why doesn't God give it to everybody? Isn't it God's will that none should perish?

Perhaps starting with the last part of the question first, it is absolutely true that the Bible states that God is not willing that any should perish. [00:16:07] That's 2 Peter.

One thing that the Bible doesn't say, however, is that God is willing that any should perish or that God has destined any to perish. And perhaps in answering these sorts of difficult questions, it is good to restrict ourselves to what the Word of God says. The Bible describes God as one who loves the world. We have that in John chapter 3. The message that Paul preached and the message that we preach is be ye reconciled to God. That's 2 Corinthians chapter 5. And that's a message that goes out to everybody and that God offers to everybody. When we come to chapter 2 of Ephesians, I'm afraid I can't assist on what the Greek might have said. [00:17:01] Perhaps others can.

But I think that for all of us, if we're in the same position as me, not knowing the Greek, we can still be helped by the context, by looking at everything that's presented in the verses that we read. And when

you have the opportunity to go back to the slides in, I think it was the second last or perhaps the last slide of my presentation, I just tried to lead us in the direction of what I think the context teaches us, which is that I was dead. There was nothing in me, no life in me, nothing at all that would respond to God. That's the beginning. The end is that I am God's workmanship. If there was nothing in me that would respond to God, then everything had to be of God.

[00:18:13] Perhaps then to answer the question expressly, I do believe that what is presented here is that the two things that are mentioned in these verses, salvation and faith, are the gift of God.

And again, if that were not the case, then we wouldn't be able to have some of the other expressions that we have in these verses. In verse 9, for example, we wouldn't be able to have the expression, not of works. We wouldn't be able to have the expression, lest any man should boast. Everything that brought about my salvation, I believe, had to come from God as a result of that. [00:19:08] Perhaps in answering this question, I can go back to something that I said earlier, that sometimes we have different truths presented about the same thing and we can't always reconcile them in our minds. And perhaps this is one of those things where we do have different truths presented, that God is not willing that any should perish, and we have the truth that we have here in Ephesians chapter 2, which to our minds are difficult to reconcile.

But perhaps I can finish just by reference to one other verse that might encourage us, even if we can't reconcile these things.

And the verse is 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 9.

[00:20:02] It says there, God's way has always been, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy.

This verse perhaps reminds us of that, where it says that we are saved according to God's own purpose. God has a purpose in the way that he is acting. Perhaps we don't appreciate it, or sorry, we can't, aren't capable of appreciating it. But fortunately we can have the confidence that he does have a purpose to the way that he acts. Thank you very much. There is, well there are two more questions.

The first one of these is relating to the question, why did the Lord choose us? The answer given was, we do not know.

[00:21:05] Surely God chose us because we believed on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, is this not so?

Brother Hugh was going to speak to us on that one. As ever, we need to go back to the scripture that we've read to see what it actually says. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4.

According as he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love. Having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, [00:22:01] according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us, wherein he has taken us into favor in the beloved.

Stop there for a moment. So this is according to the riches of his grace.

It is, if we say we don't know why we have been chosen in Christ, it is because we don't know. It is according to the riches of God's grace. That is quite clear, quite distinct in this epistle that we're reading. And I will go on from where we got to.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offenses according to the riches of his grace, which he has caused to abound toward us in all wisdom and intelligence. [00:23:05] This is all looking at the question from God's point of view. God is acting, God is choosing, God is adopting sons to himself.

And this is God's side of the truths that we're looking at. And we read nothing in these verses about believing. Believing is a separate question altogether. And I'm going to turn now to a verse in Acts. Acts 16, verse 30 and 31.

Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved? And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. [00:24:07] That's man's side of it. That's nothing to do with what we're reading here in Ephesians. Our responsibility is to believe.

And these are the words of the apostle Paul himself. Believe and thou shalt be saved. So don't look at the truth that we're reading here about selection by God himself as being in any way a denial of the truth that our responsibility is not to decide whether or not or why God chose us, but it is to believe that we might be saved. About 11 or 12 years ago, for those of you who can remember back that far and who were in the London area, our brother Ernie Brown did a series at the London Fellowship meetings [00:25:01] on the subject of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

And he likened those two things to a pair of railway lines that go on to infinity but never, ever touch one another.

And if we try to make the points of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, if we try to make them meet or cross or converge or adapt to one another, we'll never do it. We'll get hopelessly lost. We just have to believe that on the one hand, God did choose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

But my response, I wasn't there, I don't know. But I know and I can say that I have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and that is the reason I'm saved. [00:26:01] But that is not the scripture that we read this morning in chapter one. Thank you very much. We have one more question and about three and a half more minutes. And this question is for Paul Brunnsfield. The question is, when are we in the house of God? Well the short answer I think is that we are always in the house of God. The house of God is an aspect of truth. The assembly is likened unto the house of God.

And we see it in different scriptures, even the house of God in different aspects. The scripture we read today, it is a holy temple. It is a future thing which God is building. In Peter, it is seen more as the place in which spiritual sacrifices are offered up to God by a holy priesthood who have been ordained to show forth his praise. [00:27:14] So that is another aspect of the house of God. And that function goes on when we are together in assembly, but also when we are at home.

We can praise God, worship God.

When we are with other Christians, in social settings, we can praise the Lord and worship him together.

So that is one aspect of it.

There is another aspect we find in Timothy. I will read it out to you if I can.

It is 1 Timothy 3, verse 15.

[00:28:03] But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. So there, the house of God is seen as a place in which the truth is worked out in practice. If the world views Christians walking in a godly way according to scripture, they are seeing an order, a divine order which should be true of God's household. And in Hebrews, we get the same thought that Moses, he was a servant in God's house, but how much greater is the Lord? He is the son over his own house. Whose house are we if we are true believers, if we do not turn away from the truth as some would do, some Jewish professing Christians would do.

[00:29:07] They would prove they were not Christians at all and they would go back to Judaism. They would turn away from it. They would not continue faithful to the end. But those who do, they are the house of God.

And there is another illustration there of the household. Those who carry out that order which is divine and which is of the Lord. And if we read Timothy, he says that thou mightest know how to behave thyself in the house of God. If we read Timothy, it covers every aspect of the Christian life. In assembly, administration of the widows, practical matters, servants and masters, even to the extent that he tells Timothy to have a little wine for his stomach's sake. It all touches upon how we behave ourselves in the house of God. So I would say that the answer to that question is that we are always in the house of God. [00:30:06] Thank you very much.