

“Journeys and Destinations – Instruments of Grace”

Pastor Wally Contreras

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“Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples. But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” (Acts 14:24-15:5)

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Pastor Wally said that “Satan is a party-pooper”...that he stirs up passions that are not helpful to the church. In what way(s) have I seen Satan stir up “passions” that haven’t been helpful to the church in general and me specifically?

How do I respond to those that might say that it is God who is the “party-pooper”...that He’s a killjoy and frowns on us for having any “fun”?

Pastor Wally also pointed out that “they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.” In other words, because of His grace, Paul and his team of missionaries had been “entrusted” by God “for the work that they had fulfilled”. God chose to use them for His work. Hosea 14:4 declares that “I [God] will love them freely.” Spurgeon pointed out: “He who understands its meaning is a theologian, and he who can dive into its fullness is a true Master in divinity. “I will love them freely,” is a condensation of the glorious message of salvation which was delivered to us in Christ Jesus our Redeemer. The sense hinges upon the word “freely.” “I will love them freely.” Here is the glorious, the suitable, the divine way by which love streams from heaven to earth. It is, indeed, the only way in which God can love such as we are. It may be that he can love angels because of their goodness; but he could not love us for that reason; the only manner in which love can come from God to fallen creatures is expressed in the word “freely.” Here we have spontaneous love flowing forth to those who neither deserved it, purchased it, nor sought after it...Let me not leave this point till I have well defined its meaning. I mean this, dear friends: when God says, “I will love them freely,” he means that no prayers, no tears, no good works, no almsgivings are an inducement to him to love men, nay, that not only nothing, in themselves, but nothing anywhere else was the cause of his love to them; not even

the blood of Christ; not even the groans and tears of his beloved Son. These are the fruits of his love, not the cause of it. He does not love because Christ died, but Christ died because the Father loved.” To what degree am I able to wrap my mind around God’s grace...that He will love me freely? Am I a “theologian...a true Master in divinity” or something less? Explain.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10 “His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (emphasis added). Was Paul bragging that God’s decision to trust him with God’s mission to bring the Good News to the Gentiles was a good choice on His part? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Oswald Chambers once said in “My Utmost for His Highest” that: “The way we continually talk about our own inability is an insult to the Creator. The deploring of our own incompetence is a slander against God for having overlooked us. Get into the habit of examining in the sight of God the things that sound humble before men, and you will be amazed at how staggeringly impertinent they are. “Oh, I shouldn’t like to say I am sanctified; I’m not a saint.” Say that before God; and it means – “No, Lord, it is impossible for You to save and sanctify me; there are chances I have not had; so many imperfections in my brain and body; no, Lord, it isn’t possible.” That may sound wonderfully humble before men, but before God it is an attitude of defiance... There is only one relationship that matters, and that is your personal relationship to a personal Redeemer and Lord. Let everything else go, but maintain that at all costs, and God will fulfil His purpose through your life. One individual life may be of priceless value to God’s purposes, and yours may be that life.” Do I, at times, say things that tend to downplay my involvement in God’s work that may actually reflect “an attitude of defiance” to God? Explain.

Pastor Wally spoke of the “Christ-plus” mentality of the Pharisees that salvation required their circumcision and them keeping of the law of Moses. R.C. Sproul once pointed out that “Understanding that sin makes us thick-headed, unwilling to accept certain truths when they receive minimal emphasis, the biblical authors repeat foundational doctrines so that they might penetrate our hearts and minds. The man-made religions of this world prove that without the work of the Holy Spirit, people think that they are basically good and can contribute something to their salvation. This strips glory from God and gives it to us, for if we can do even one thing to merit salvation, then we deserve some credit. All belief systems except biblical Christianity encourage us to believe that we contribute to our salvation, even if they deceitfully assert otherwise...Paul explains that so many Jews in his day failed to follow Christ because they pursued righteousness the wrong way. Instead of seeking it by faith, they sought it by works (Romans 9:30-32a). They had a twofold problem. First, they had too high an estimate of their ability to obey the Lord, which led them to believe they could meet the perfect standard required to be declared righteous in God’s sight. To be sure, these Jews believed they needed divine

assistance to achieve righteousness, but they thought their imperfect but divinely aided efforts would suffice... Second, the Jews who rejected Jesus erred by treating the law as an end in itself. Instead of looking for the One to whom the law of God points, they saw the Mosaic law as the Lord's final act of salvation. Thus, Christ became a stumbling block to them (Rom. 9:32b-33)." R.C. Sproul pointed out once that "The created world is called to reflect the glory of God. The very fact that God makes a creature places that creature in debt to the Creator. And the only reason you exist and that I exist is for Him. There's nothing inherently dignified about dirt, and that's what we've been made from. The reason why you count is because God says you count." How do I explain that "salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (and this is where we most often stop because the Reformers dropped the rest...but), as revealed in Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone" to my "Who's Your One"?

R.C. Sproul went on to say that "[t]he peasant armed with one verse of Scripture has more authority than a pope or a church council who does not have Scripture." To what degree do I agree or disagree with that statement and why?

God used Paul and his missionary team to preach the Good News to the Gentiles and Paul told everyone about all "that God had done with them." Martin Luther once said that "God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does." What has God "done with" me that I can share with my "Who's Your One"?

Pastor Wally said that I must look at my life as being commended (to hand myself over, to entrust my life) to the grace of God so I may be used by the grace of God. Are there things in my life that I really want to hold on to and not hand over to Him? If so, what are some of those things? If not, why not?

How many of the things I want to hold on to are considered "fun things" (aka sin)?

Do I withhold parts of myself from Him because I fear that the thing that God may use me for is something I believe would be inconvenient or too costly for me? Explain.