

LaR 197  
SERMON

preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill on Friday evening  
June 6th, 1952

Text: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord". 1 Corinthians 1 v.9

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What a foundation is this for poor sinners to build their hopes upon! "God is faithful". We read in connection with the promise to Abraham that "because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself..... that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered". "God is faithful" - He must be; it is in the very nature of things that God is faithful. He must be faithful to Himself, He cannot deny Himself; we would say it reverently, he cannot act in any way contrary to His nature. He is faithful to the promise He has given, to the covenant He has made, the covenant of grace; He is faithful to His Son and He is faithful to all who by His grace trust in Him. "God is faithful". The safety of His people does not rest in their own faithfulness for they are fickle, they are weak, they are foolish, they are easily entangled and turned aside, but their safety lies in the faithfulness of God. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" "By whom ye were called". These Corinthians to whom the Apostle wrote were people who were "called to be saints". They were called out of this world, out of darkness into light and from the power of Satan unto the kingdom of God's dear Son. It was a call by grace, it was wholly of the grace of God that He called them, not for their duties or deserts, but according as He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began, because He had a favour to them, because He loved them with an everlasting love, because of the great, wonderful and blessed purposes of His love and grace He called them. What a great thing it is to be called of God!

"When calls effectual reach the heart  
To teach that God is love".

God does not come, as some people make out He does, imploring people to allow Him to save them, but He comes and calls them with an effectual calling, and He makes them willing, He makes them willing. He does not drag people unwillingly to heaven, He makes them willing in the day of His power, He "changes the heart, renews the will, and turns the feet to Zion's hill". O how wonderful is the power of grace! the reigning power of grace, grace given to a sinner and grace communicating to a sinner a new

life, communicating grace whereby that sinner repents, believes and loves the Lord and follows after Him. All this the Lord bestows when He calls a sinner by His grace. He calls a poverty-stricken wretch that He may enrich him, He calls a guilty man that He may pardon him, a sinful creature that He may sanctify him and make him "meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light". It is a wonderful thing to be called; do we know what it is to be called of God? Has that call reached our hearts? One of our hymn-writers says,

"A remnant small of humble souls  
His grace mysteriously controls  
With sweet alluring call.  
They hear it and His person view,  
They learn to love and follow too,  
And take Him for their all".

O what a favour it is to have that call reach the heart, an effectual call, a call attended with such power and such grace as constrains the soul to obedience.

"My soul obeys the almighty call,  
And runs to this relief;  
I would believe thy promise, Lord,  
O help my unbelief".

When the Lord calls poor sinners to Himself it is because He will be glorified in them. Luther said in his comment on the Galatians, "Whom GOD calls He uses". The weakest and feeblest of those whom He calls He calls for His glory, that He may be glorified in them, and He uses them to that end. They may seem to themselves very useless, to have no gifts and no opportunities of usefulness, and yet the Lord may be using them wonderfully. We read of those parts of the body that seem most feeble that they are most necessary. A poor invalid lying helplessly upon a bed of pain and weariness and what must ultimately be a bed of death, may feel very useless. 'Why am I suffered to live so useless a life as this?' and yet that person may be very much used of God for His glory. They may be more useful than they have any conception of. The Lord has wonderful ways of using His people so that Luther's was a true word. "Whom He calls, He uses". And one thing He does when He calls a poor sinner, He makes him willing to be used by Him. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

"God is faithful by whom ye were called". He calls poor sinners to repentance. I do not mean now the general call by which God commandeth all men everywhere to repent, but I mean that inward call by which He calls effectually to repentance. No man can or will repent except that inward call, that almighty call, reaches his heart and conscience. They are called to repentance. When this call comes to them they are brought down before the Lord in godly sorrow, and godly sorrow is a very precious grace. It

will be well for us if we pray for more of it. Robert Murray McCheyne said, "More tears, Lord, more tears". O that we could weep over our sins and over our sinfulness! Alas, that our hearts are so hard and our eyes so dry! But the Lord calls to repentance, calls to a godly weeping for sin, We read of those who "wept between the porch and the altar. We are told that "with weeping and with supplications" He will lead them, and this is a precious exercise to be mourning and weeping over sin, confessing sin before the Lord, and He calls His people to it. This is one effect of His word upon their hearts that they are drawn thus to repentance and to weep out their contrition at the Lord's feet.

Then they are called also to faith, to a life of faith in the Lord Jesus; and that they might have faith in Him they are caused to know Him. "They shall all know me from the least even to the greatest" said the Lord. "They shall all be taught of God". "Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me" said Christ. So they are blessed with a measure of true knowledge of Christ, and as they are made to know Him, as He is discovered to them in His suitability to meet the varied and deep necessities of their cases, so they are persuaded to trust in Him. O, it is wonderful to realise in some measure what Jesus is! to have before one's eyes one's own necessity, one's wretchedness as a sinner, one's deep poverty, and then to have a discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ in His Person and His work and the exceeding riches of His grace. O how handsomely that answers every need. "All I need in Jesus dwells", said one, "and there it dwells for me". It is wonderful to have such discoveries of the Lord Jesus, glimpses of Him, just blinks of Christ now and then, and the effect is that the soul is drawn to Him in faith and love, in a way of believing confidence and real affection. It is impossible to know Him and not to love Him. It is impossible to know and love Him and not to trust Him. O if you know Him you will realise how worthy He is of your deepest, warmest, sincerest love and also how worthy He is to be believed, how worthy He is to be trusted. Well, they are called to the knowledge of Christ, and they are called to a life of faith in Him. A life of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a life of continual coming to Him. It is not that presumptuous, unassaulted confidence that some people call faith. There are many people who talk about believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who know nothing of coming to Him. They know nothing of coming with a bad case, with a needy condition, with a sin-sick soul; they really have no use for Christ. All they have use for is their own fancied capability, but when a soul is really called to a life of faith upon the Son of God it is to a life of more or less continual coming to Jesus Christ. One says, "and Him in everything employ". O for more errands to Jesus Christ and to have constraint laid

upon us to be coming "to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel." "To whom coming, as unto a living Stone", says Peter.

This is the life of faith then, to be coming to Jesus Christ. And how coming to Him? Not as having in self some worth or worthiness and coming on that ground. No, coming guilty, coming helpless, coming with no ability at all to contribute anything towards one's own justification, without a thought that is good to plead, completely destitute, so to come. And the Lord Jesus invite poverty-stricken people, He invites beggars to His feast. "He that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price". "The poorer the wretch, the welcomer here" one says. These people who are called to Christ are the destitute, the poor, the guilty, the wretched, the blind, the lame, the sick, poor people full of leprosy. These are called to Christ by His gospel, He causes them to hear that sweet, alluring call, and so they are constrained and enabled again and again to come to Him. O how they would fain come to Him - "O cast us not away, though vile", "Do not turn away thy face, mine's an urgent pressing case".

Well, His people are called, as we have already hinted, to love Him. The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto them. Sometimes their love to Him seems to rise no higher than this, a desire to love Him. They would love Him if they could. 'O that I could love the Lord'. "When shall thy love constrain this heart thy own to be?" It is not at all a bad sign when a poor soul is exercised with anxious and fervent desires to be enabled to love the Lord. O His people are called to love Him. He draws them with the cords of love, with the bands of a man. My old pastor used to say, 'He loves love into them'. Sometimes He gives them such a manifestation of His great love to them that they cannot but love Him in return, and love, of course, is an active principle - love labours. Love is not content to be idle, to do nothing. If you love a person with an intense affection you simply burn to do something to show your love to that person; by word or by deed you show your love to them, and so it is with those who love the Lord Jesus. There is the labour of love, and their love goes out to Him in various ways. They love Him in His Word, and then for His sake they love the means of grace, they love His people and love their company. They love His appearing to their souls, and O how precious to them are the appearances of the Lord Jesus to their poor souls! How they look for the visits of His grace! How they prize them when they get them! when they experience what we read in the Song of Solomon, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow" - "I sat down" under His

shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste". O those who truly love the Lord do long for such experiences as that, and when they get them they will say to the Lord, 'Lord, be not as a wayfaring man that tarrieth but for a night; abide with us'. So said the two disciples, "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent". They did not want to part from their pleasing companion, they wanted Him to stay with them. I remember a good man, a humble man in Berkshire who had been listening with much profit to a sermon by a certain minister, and he said, 'I got that bold I asked Him to come and stop a month.' A simple utterance it was, but it just revealed the depth of feeling in that man's heart, as he realised a little of the unction of the Lord's gracious presence, he wanted Him to stay with him.

"More frequent let thy visits be,  
Or let them longer last;  
I can do nothing without Thee  
Make haste, O God, make haste".

O if we love Him we shall want His presence, we shall want Him to abide with us, we shall want to hear His voice, we shall want to feel His sweet embraces, "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth", and the kisses of His mouth are very sweet. I remember once, after an accident many years ago I lay in bed and those words were very sweet to me, "A kiss or a stroke of His rod is all from immutable love". Those words "immutable love" turned over and over in my heart, and I remember feeling that it was well worth while to have fallen down and injured my arm as I had done in my native city Leicester, to have the Lord come and kiss me with the kisses of His mouth. I have never forgotten the sweetness of it. Well, if we do love Him we shall want tokens of His love, we shall want Him to come and say to us, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." His people are called to love Him, and it was love to Christ that made the apostle Paul so willing to spend and be spent in His service. No labour too great, no sufferings too severe for him to face for his Lord's sake. "And if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all". He says, "Rejoice in my sufferings for you"; again he says, "The love of Christ constraineth us". O it made him willing to engage in that toilsome labour, the labour of an apostle of Jesus Christ, and so love constrains people to seek in such humble ways (and often obscure ways) as are open to them, to serve the Lord, to serve Him in the persons of His people. And this is the only right motive of a minister of Jesus Christ. If this motive is lacking everything is lacking, "The love of Christ constraineth us". "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel" said the Apostle. He counted himself a debtor

to preach the gospel to his fellow sinners; it was laid upon him, he must do it, it was his very life to do it. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain". The Lord's people are called to love Him, they are called to serve Him, to be to the praise of the glory of His grace. God is glorified in His people as they bear fruit to the honour of His name. He is glorified in them. "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit."

Then we are told here, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord". As I said at the outset, everything depends upon the faithfulness of God, and the continuance of His called ones in His ways. Their faithfulness to His truth, their continued adherence to the gospel, their coming well to the end of their race, is all of His faithfulness. "God is faithful". Were it not for the faithfulness of God there would be no hope; if it depended upon our stability, upon our perseverance it would be very, very poor work indeed, it would be ruin, it would be utter failure; but it all hangs on the faithfulness of God.

"I on thy promises depend,  
At least I to depend desire,  
That thou wilt love me to the end,  
Be with me in temptation's fire,  
Wilt for me work, and in me too,  
And guide me right, and bring me through".

The hymn writer had nothing else to depend upon. Where would Peter have been were it not for the faithfulness of God, the faithfulness of His Lord? "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not". "God is faithful", and so He will prove Himself to His people in all the vicissitudes, all the trials and temptations of their earthly pilgrimage; He will prove Himself faithful. "If God be for us, who can be against us", said the apostle. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it".

"Called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord". What a great thing this is! A great thing for a poor sinner to contemplate, to be called to such fellowship as this, "the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord". "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake". Fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ means fellowship with Him in suffering. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me". "The fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord". Fellowship then with Him in the sufferings that sin brought to Him. Sin is made an affliction to a child of God, and it will be his greatest affliction. His severest tribulation will arise

from his experience of indwelling sin. Well, in that he is brought into fellowship with Christ, who suffered once for sin. He suffered for sins, but not His own sins, they were only His by imputation; but His people suffer for sin as they find it lurking and working in their own wretched hearts until they cry 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' They have fellowship with Christ, and in temptation, as they are assailed by the great tempter, the devil, they are brought into fellowship with a suffering Redeemer. Think of the apostle Paul. For his profit, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. He besought the Lord three times that it might depart from him. In that he had fellowship with His suffering Redeemer. You remember how the Lord Jesus Christ, being in agony, prayed earnestly, three times He prayed, that if it were possible this cup might pass from Him. "Nevertheless", said He, "not my will, but Thine be done". And so His people, like the apostle Paul, are brought into fellowship with Christ in such experiences as this, as they come into circumstances of trial and affliction so contrary to what they would have, things that are very painful to the flesh, things which their proud hearts would resent. As they are brought into these things they are brought into fellowship with Christ, in these trials and afflictions and in the exercises of their hearts respecting them. "Fellowship with Christ".

Then again, the Lord Jesus Christ cares much for His sheep. When He was upon earth O how He cared for His sheep, how He was among them, how He caused them to hear His voice, to follow Him. How He cared for them! wept over them! What a Shepherd He was to them! Their welfare was dear to Him, and if we are called to fellowship with Christ, there will be a measure of the same love and the same care for His people. The sheep that are so beloved of Christ will be also beloved by us. "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren". And if we love them truly, it will not be in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth, and there is a fellowship with Christ in this. As we sympathise with our brethren in their temptations, downcastings and afflictions, and as according to our ability we seek to comfort them, and minister relief to them, in all this there is fellowship with Christ as it is done through principles of love, love to them for His sake. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me" - fellowship with Christ in His love to His people. We read of the fellowship of ministering to the saints, and here it is. It is fellowship with Christ when they are moved to this while ministering to His saints. Said He, "I am among you as one that serveth", and so as His people are called to fellowship with Him they are called to a

like-mindedness with the Lord Jesus Christ. So they are content to be in the church as humble servants of the church, willing to spend and be spent for the sake of Christ's cause and His people, "Called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord".

"And these things", said John, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ". There will be fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ in this - a delight in His Father's will. Said the apostle, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man", and so it is with the true people of God. After the inward man, according to the principle of grace that he implants within them, they love the things that the Father has commanded, and they love His most holy will, although to their sorrow they find another principle within them that is opposed to it and is bitter enmity to it; yet there is a principle within them that loves it.

"They love the men the Father loves,  
And hate the works He hates".

In this they have fellowship with Christ, and as they seek to worship God in Spirit and in truth they have fellowship with Christ in it, and in every attempt to draw near to the Father in the name and through the blood and merits of His own dear Son, in all this there is fellowship with Christ. "God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord". O what a high privilege is this! What a blessedness there is in it! O that we could realise more of the blessedness of it, realise more what a privilege it is, how much to be desired it is! O that we could be led to pray that we might know more of this sweet fellowship, the fellowship unto which the people of God are called by Him who is faithful. He who is faithful to His people will perform the work He has begun in their souls unto the day of Jesus Christ. Having begun the work He will not fail to complete it, for He is faithful to Himself as we said at the outset, faithful to His covenant, faithful to His promise, faithful to His Son, and faithful to all the operations of His own holy Spirit in the hearts of His people. May the Lord command His blessing, Amen.

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