



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 3:18–23

1 Corinthians

“The Christian Heritage

TRANSCRIPT

I want to answer fully a question that was asked, and there is also a new question. Nancy Ryan, I don't see her here tonight, but she asked a question, how is the hypostatic union alike or different from the indwelling Spirit's ministry to the spirit of man?

Now, I didn't have time to answer that, I answered I think the latter part of her question, did Jesus depend on revelation for his knowledge, or did he know innately that knowledge? And of course, he knew the knowledge, but he voluntarily surrendered the divine use of his attributes during the time of his earthly ministry. That's what the hypostatic union is. “Hypostatic” is a term that means *hypostasis*. The Greek term means “person.” So hypostatic union means the personal union of the two natures, the divine and the human, in the one person. So hypostatic union means simply, the personal union of the two natures.

And her question is: how is the hypostatic union alike or different from the indwelling Spirit's ministry to the spirit of man? Well, really, they are very different because, in the case of our Lord, we have two natures joined together in the one person. The Westminster Confession of Faith puts it very simply—you know we would learn a lot if we just read the confessions of faith of the orthodox Christian bodies. There's nothing wrong with doing that. You know, it's like reading good theology. They're not perfect. They're written by men. They have flaws in them, and we should expect that. But the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it this way, “Two whole perfect and

distinct natures, the Godhead and manhood were inseparably joined in one person without conversion, composition, or confusion.” You may put it another way, the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons. So that’s the hypostatic union.

Did get an interesting question last time, and I have received one tonight, which I’ll try to answer next week. This question is probably one that has occurred to a number of people but perhaps you may have been afraid to ask it, and the person who gave it to me was not afraid to ask it. And so he said, I do not understand the passage in 1 Corinthians 3:14 and 15 regarding rewards. Let me read those verses again. “If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” He goes on to say, perhaps you’ve at one point in your life asked the same question who would care about receiving a reward if one is destined for eternity with God. Likewise who cares what loss is suffered, what loss can be compared to gaining eternity with God?

What is the context then of this section of Scripture? Paul is not going to motivate people, is he? Surely he wouldn’t threaten people into trying to do right with such a flimsy threat. Well, of course there are many things about reward that I would confess I don’t understand, but the Scriptures make it plain there is such a thing as a reward. And in this context, it’s a reward that relates, as the context makes plain, to Christian service. You might reply with another question, shall a person—shall two persons who are believing Christians, one of whom is a very faithful Christian and the other one, one who is not very faithful but, nevertheless, is a believer, shall they have the same existence in the presence of the Lord? Will there be no recognition, anyway, of the difference of their Christian service?

So I haven’t yet been to heaven, and I’m not [laughter] I didn’t have to say that, I know [sustained laughter] but I, of course, don’t know the answer to precisely what this difference of rewards is going to be. Maybe it’s simply a more thorough enjoyment of the presence of God. I do know that those who are in heaven are all going to be happy and are to enjoy throughout eternity

eternal life. Perhaps it has something to do with the abilities of a person to enjoy. Two people can be totally happy, but yet one have more ability to be happy, and it may be principally that or it may be specifically with related to service. It was a good question. We should think about it, no doubt.

Now, tonight we're turning to 1 Corinthians 3, verse 18 through verse 23. And let's begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the Word of God, and we again ask for enlightenment. Lord, we know that it is obvious to all of us and to one another that no human being understands the divine Word fully. Our Lord did when he was here, the God-man, but we study the Word of God to know Thee better. And we pray, Lord, as we study Thou wilt give us further understanding. Enable us also to serve Thee in a way that is pleasing to Thee, and we pray for all in this auditorium that their service may be such as to obtain the rewards that the apostle mentions and that others mention and that our Lord himself mentions in the last book of the Bible. We ask now as we study Thou wilt give us understanding and may our understanding be manifested in a closer walk with Thee, day by day. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject, as I mentioned, is the Christian Heritage. The hot term today in politics and psychology and religion, perhaps in other things too, is the term “values.” We are hearing a lot of it even in our political discussions. I think last week I mentioned Dan Quayle. He inadvertently was a catalyst for the discussion of values and his comments concerning *Murphy Brown* or Candice Bergman and the TV program. Lots of fun was made over Mr. Quayle and the campaign, and we know that people have given it a good bit of thought because now the term “values” has become very significant. And even our president, whose people around him at least, were making fun of Dan Quayle, are now talking a great deal about values.

And in the present difficulties in the White House, it is obvious that this term is a very existentialist kind of term, because the president is defending his wife by saying that he does not know of anyone who has a better sense of right and wrong than his wife. And, furthermore, he has

even said that—I thought I had the statement here—in which he comments upon the fact that her moral compass is as strong as anyone’s in this country. And that’s a comment concerning values.

And I cannot pass judgment on right or wrong of this, but at least it’s evident that in our political life, we already knew this word was important in our spiritual life, and in our moral life the term “values” has become very significant. In fact, some of our political commentators put it in—put the same thing forward by using a different term. They use the term “character.” It’s popular among politicians at times to make fun of what least say that character is insignificant in politics, and we should not vote on the grounds of character. But I think in our soberer moments we realize that what a man’s character manifests what it is, manifests itself in what he thinks, what he says, and what he does. Character is important.

And the Bible, of course, sets forth for us the kind of moral compass that should guide all of us. It’s our moral compass, it’s our spiritual compass, and there we find God’s moral imperatives for our life.

Now, we, as Christians, we believe that they are the final moral imperatives for men. We know that others do not agree with us. We know there are many who do not even believe the Bible at all. There are those who say they believe the Bible but would not go so far as to say that what the Bible says about morals is necessarily to be followed in every detail. But for many, many Christians, the Bible is a source of the way to life, and it also sets forth the principles by which we are to live our lives.

One of the things that becomes evident when we read the Bible is that when we read the Bible, and we look at what it has to say, we discover in it that Almighty God trashes, to use a common word, trashes many of the values that are treasured and cherished by the world. The kingdom of sports. I probably have offended as much as anyone there. How are the Cowboys going to do this fall? Is it really true that Newton is going to leave? Could he leave? That’d be terrible. That’d be worth a discussion, wouldn’t it? What about all of the other things that have to do with the sports world? I have to ask myself often, are you being carried away with that?

The Rangers now are getting ready to start play. I’m looking at their pitching staff and wondering if it will manage to hold up throughout this season. I doubt it. Well, I didn’t mean to give my predictions [laughter]. But you can see I’m thinking about these things, and those things can be things that we treasure and cherish so much that we really are not pleasing our Lord in heaven; the kingdom of sports, self-indulgence, self-gratification, self-ism itself, the longing for power, for prestige, and affluence.

God, in this passage that we’ve been looking at from chapter 1 right through this point here, opposes the weakness of the cross of Jesus Christ to it all. Notice he says in verse 25, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. In other words, it’s the world’s wisdom verses God’s wisdom. And God’s wisdom is gathering—gathers around the cross of Jesus Christ and all the things that are connected with it. The world’s wisdom is opposed to it. Now, the fact that in the cross of Christ there is wisdom, God’s wisdom is a ground of hope for all of us.

Now, in the 18th verse of chapter 3 the apostle writes, “Let no man deceive himself, if anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.” He’s returning to the contrast after the section on the rewards between wisdom of the world with—and the wisdom of God. The wisdom of the world ultimately is salvation by works. The same kind of idea that most people who don’t know anything about Scriptural things really believe that one way or another the salvation of men depends upon what they do. The Bible, as you know, opposes it. Most of you in this auditorium have no problem with that at all. You know that the Bible says for by grace you are saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it’s the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.

Most of you even know that the Roman Catholic system is founded upon the principle of salvation through works, religious works, but, nevertheless, things that we do. The sacramental system in all of its makeup gathers around that very point, men are saved through works. What the

apostles opposed to that is the salvation through the wisdom of God as he puts it in chapter 2 in verse 2: Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Now, he’s mentioned that and not simply that place. He said back in chapter 1 in verse 18: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” And then in chapter 2, or later in chapter 1 in verse 23 through verse 25 he talks about it again, “But we preach Christ crucified to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” And then in Chapter 2, verse 2 the passage we mentioned in verse 6, “However we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age who are coming to nothing.” In verse 8, “Which none of the rulers of this age knew for had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

Now, in verse 18, “Let no one deceive himself if anyone among you seems to be wise in this age.” Now I’m going to suggest that we render that, because the word may mean both “to seem” or to “think.” Let’s render it as think. “Let no one deceive himself, if anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.” Now, that is very striking, really: unwisely thinking that worldly wisdom is superior to Paul, Cephas, and the wisdom that they were proclaiming. And failing to remember that God’s assessment is the only assessment that counts in the end, and he says the wisdom of God is that which we should be concerned about.

Now, the way he puts it in verse 18, it almost sounds as if wisdom is not important at all. Notice it again, let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age let him become a fool that he may become wise. *Become a fool*. Well, he’s not trying to tell us that wisdom is not valid. There is much about human wisdom that is valid. But all human wisdom must be subjugated to divine wisdom is the point that the context as a whole makes. So let him become a fool means, let him so far as his worldly wisdom subjected to the wisdom found in the Word of God. And consider those aspects of human wisdom that overlap divine wisdom and contradict it to be the wisdom that is foolish in the sight of God.

Now, he explains. The 19th verse begins *for*. I think these little words—I’ve said this so many times, but I notice that people when they read the Bible don’t notice these little words, and they ought to notice them because they are the things that give you the clue to the way the author is trying to set forth his argument. He says *for*. He’s going now to explain the paradox of wisdom. “For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God for it is written, he catches the wise in their own craftiness,” and again the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise that they are futile.

John Calvin says this is an argument from the contrary: “The only way to be wise is to be foolish in the world’s sight.” That seems strange, doesn’t it? The only way to be wise is to be foolish in God’s sight. Well, all that is simply saying that the way to be wise, truly wise, is to accept the divine wisdom, and the divine wisdom is foolish in the sight of the world. So as he says, If you want to be wise, you must become foolish, but you’re not really foolish. You’re foolish in the sight of the world, not foolish in the sight of God. You accepted the wisdom of God when you affirm your belief, true belief in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Now, the apostle is a great believer in the Bible. It’s very interesting how he calls up these passages, and he didn’t have all of the tools that we have. He didn’t have Quick Verse for example. Some of you use Quick Verse on your computer, and all you have to do is to do a few things with your hand and suddenly the text you’re looking for emerges, and there it is before your face. And some of you have even more—perhaps even more difficult or technical types of Biblical helps. And you not only can call up the English text, you can call up the Greek text, or the Hebrew text, and even the form, and it is all explained before you by just using your computer. The apostle didn’t do that. And when you think about the fact that they had simply manuscripts—and not all of them were available. He didn’t carry around all of those manuscripts with him. He didn’t have the sixty-six books that you have. He didn’t even have the thirty-nine of the Old Testament. He had some of them, probably with him. He mentions books and parchments in 2 Timothy chapter 4, so he did have some manuscripts, but he didn’t have all. He probably even went in the library, think of that,

the library of the synagogues and looked up the manuscripts that they may have had, and he studied them. But he studied them well enough to be able to cite them wherever he was.

And so here the first one he cites is Job chapter 5 in verse 13, “For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God, for it is written, He catches the wise in their own craftiness.” Now, that’s a word from one of the Old Testament men who was not too wise himself, it is from Eliphaz in Job. Now, he wasn’t too wise, not near as wise as Job ultimately became, but he was one of those wise men that tormented Job. And he here expresses something that the apostle regards as true. He catches the wise in their own craftiness. This is God.

Now, can you think of ways in which he catches the wise in their own craftiness? Well, as I was sitting at my desk and thinking about this, now how is this fulfilled in the Word of God? Well, immediately I thought of the book of Esther, because that is a beautiful illustration of how God catches the wise in their own craftiness. The story of Esther and Mordecai and Haman is one of the most striking in the Old Testament. The Jews of course celebrate it, one of their feasts. But it’s one of the most marvelous expressions of the providence of God in the Word of God.

Here is wicked Haman, the Agagite. And he’s plotting against the Jews, and finally it seems as if he’s now going to be able to exterminate those Jews, but unfortunately King Xerxes has a dream and rather he couldn’t sleep I guess it was. But anyway, he reads something, and it puzzles him. And so he finds out information about it, and the result is that Haman who is planning on putting [Mordecai] on a cross and having him killed winds up by the providential work of God on that cross himself. The story is found in the book of Esther, along about the 6th or 7th chapter, I believe it is. That’s Old Testament, isn’t it? It’s in—chapter 6 is where the king could not sleep, and so he commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, the door keepers, that sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Then the king said, What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this? And the king’s servant who attended him said nothing had been done for him.

And so Haman, as a result of this, is forced to honor Mordecai. And then later again by the providence of God, Haman is hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai. There it is, chapter 7, verse 10. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, then the king’s wrath subsided.

Now, Job said—he wasn’t thinking about this so far as I know—he catches the wise in their own craftiness. And so crafty Haman is caught by the providential power of the Lord God.

There’s another instance in the Old Testament that came to my mind, and it’s the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel chapter 17. And there you’ll remember that the great Philistine comes out and challenges and threatens the children of Israel. In chapter 17 in verse 8 we read, “Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel and said to them, Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me, if he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we’ll be your servants and if I prevail against him and kill him then you shall be our servants and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day, give me a man that we may fight together.”

Now, the children of Israel and Saul, particularly, [who] stood head and shoulders above anyone else, were terrified. But now we know, of course, that God had determined long ago that little David, little shepherd boy, was going to be the one who was going to slay the giant. And so he does it, and not only does he slay him, but he does it in royal fashion. And not only slays him, he struck him and killed him with a sling shot, a sling shot. And here is Goliath with this mighty body of his and the army that he had—the army that he had was so big that when David afterwards tried to walk in it someone said that he took three steps before it moved. It was that big. And David with one stone struck the giant in the critical point, killed him, and then with his own sword cut off his head. That’s another instance of the outstanding providence of God.

As I was thinking—you see I do meditate some. I was trying to think of some other illustrations as they came to my mind. And one of them came to my mind from the 17th chapter of the book of Revelation because it seemed so strange that in chapter 17 of the book of Revelation we

should read these things. This is the story of the beasts. And we read in verse 3, “So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of the names of blasphemy having seven heads and ten horns.” A beast having seven heads and ten horns. And then we read on through the account. And finally in verse 14 when there’s war between the beast who has seven heads and ten horns, who is there to overcome the beast? This giant, awful-sounding, threatening beast, a lamb. And so we read in verse 14, “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are called with Him are called, Chosen, and faithful.” That is part of the irony of the Word of God that the lamb, a little lamb and vision slays the giant beast with the seven heads and the ten horns.

But of course, the supreme illustration of the work of the Lord God and the supreme illustration of this text in 1 Corinthians 3 in verse 19, he catches the wise in their own craftiness is our Lord’s ministry itself in the cross of Christ. In Acts chapter 3 in verse 12 and following we read these words,

“So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people, ‘Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your fathers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Messiah should suffer, He has thus fulfilled.’”

And so what has happened, well, God in His sovereign providence has brought it about that our Lord Jesus Christ who was put to death by the Romans and the Jews is his Messiah. And Satan, who was so anxious to do everything that he possibly could toward the death of our Lord, discovers that unsuccessfully, he and the Gentiles and the Jews in successfully carrying out their purpose of putting him to death, Satan himself brought his own ultimate downfall, and the Jews and the Gentiles to who put him to death also brought it to pass that those believers in him have the fruition of eternal life. So the very persons who fight against the will of God are the tools of the Lord God in bringing to pass his will. So the words in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 in verse 19 are fulfilled by the Lord himself in a marvelous way, he catches the wise in their own craftiness. They sought it with all of their wisdom and all of their might to destroy the Son of God, but God caught them in their craftiness.

Now, the apostle cites another text. He says, The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise that they are futile. Now, this word is a word that means thoughts all right, but, generally speaking, it's the thoughts that are the reasonings of men contrary to the Word of God. Let me just read a few of the passages, if you want to look at them turn to Luke chapter 5 in verse 22 where we have the story of the paralytic being healed. And while you're finding it if you want to look it up I'll start reading verse 16:

“So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed

through the tiling into the midst before Jesus. And when He saw their faith, He said to him, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven you.’ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, ‘Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sin, but God alone?’ But when Jesus perceived their thoughts”—that’s our word their reasoning’s when he perceived their reasoning’s—“He answered and said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise; the reasoning’s that they are futile.”

Now, also in the very next chapter verse 8 our Lord is healing on the Sabbath and we read here in Luke 6,

“Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered. So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Arise and stand here.’ And he arose and stood. Then Jesus said to them, ‘I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?’ And when He had looked round at them all, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’”

That’s so interesting because this man had a withered hand, he couldn’t stretch his hand out. But at the word of our Lord he stretched forth his hand. It’s like people saying if you cannot believe, how can you believe? Well, in the power of the Word of God is to transform our unwillingness to willingness, our unfaith to faith. But notice back in verse 8, But he knew their thoughts and said to the man that had the withered hand arise and stand there again. Verse 20 of 1 Corinthians 3, “The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

John Calvin has an interesting little comment here. He says, “This is an excellent passage for bringing down the confidence of the flesh, for here God declares from above that whatever the mind of man conceives in purpose is simply nothingness when it is contrary to the Word of God.” I would gather from this that it is important for us to know what God’s Word says, and it’s important for us to follow what he says, wouldn’t you?

Well, let me tell you one thing that he says. He says that reading the Bible is healthy. He says study to show yourself approved unto God that you might be the kind of man that might be called a worthy servant of the Lord God. So let me ask you a question, have you been reading the Bible? Is your reading the reading you do when you come to the meetings Sunday morning, if you come to the meeting Sunday morning, and you open up the Scriptures and follow Dan who is teaching us in the pulpit? Is that your reading of the Word? That’s not enough. That would seem to me shows inadequate appreciation of God’s Word for us.

Spiritual healthiness is the result of applying ourselves to the reading of the Word of God and also to the personal relationship with the Lord that one has when he lives his life in fellowship and communion with him. It is important for us, my Christian friends, to maintain that close relationship with the Lord, to read his Word, to spend time in prayer and not simply when we have some special need. The Lord loves to have communion with his saints, for you to enjoy communion with him, and so let us really respond to what the Scripture says about some of these important things. This is an excellent passage, as Mr. Calvin says, for bringing down the confidence of the flesh,

because God tells us that whatever the mind of man conceives and purposes is really nothingness in comparison with the wisdom of God.

Well, now we have the conclusion in verse 21 through verse 23: Therefore—actually the Greek text says *so then*—So then let no one boast in men. The pride of wisdom and glorying, in men shares a common affinity, the party spirit. The pride that I have in wisdom and the pride that I have when I express it by glorying in those who hold views that I personally are sympathetic with or perhaps they are sympathetic with me. That kind of pride, the apostle says, is party spirit, and often accompanying it is shallow arrogance. You find often Christians who make statements like, I am a follower of, or, I am a follower of this, or, I am a follower of that. If you do that seriously, if you really think that your Christian life is bound up in following one man or a party, you’ve missed the point of the Word of God.

Now, it’s perfectly all right, it seems to me, for us to praise individuals who have been helpful to us in the ministry of the Word of God, but it’s this party spirit that Paul is talking about. I am of Paul, I am of Cephas, I am of Apollos, or even the party spirit of I am of the Lord because I’m competing with Apollos, Cephas, and Paul. So this pride of wisdom, the pride of glorying in men, that’s the arrogance of the party spirit.

Don Carson, who has written a beautiful little treatise on some of these chapters here, says that “To boast about some hero or guru is wrong for two reasons; it’s wrong because the focus is wrong, the concentration is on some human being and not on the Lord.” I know what you’re thinking. Dr. Johnson, you talk about Calvin all the time. I mentioned Calvin this time. I just cited him. I didn’t say he’s my guru. He isn’t. And I think I can praise him, but I wouldn’t follow everything that John Calvin says. In fact, the only reason that I say I’m a Calvinist is because it’s a short way of telling you something of what I believe. I’ve been in places where they have told me after I was there I would never speak there again because I use the term “Calvinist.” To my mind, that’s party spirit, too.

I was in Edmonton some years ago. I happened to mention Calvinism in the message. A man from Edmonton called me later on, who was rather favorable to the ministry I have given, and he said, “Lewis, I’m sorry to tell you but you’ll never speak in Edmonton again in this meeting.” And it was a meeting of several of the churches came together on Easter. It was made in a public building, a big public building. “You mentioned the term, Calvinism, and one of the men on the board said, because you mentioned the term, Calvinism, he’d never agree to invite you back.” That was told to me almost twenty years ago. The prophecy has come true [laughter]. I have never been invited back.

But it is a short cut, if you want to know what I believe, I can say, Well, I’m a Calvinist. That means I believe in the depravity of man. I believe in unconditional election. I believe in definite atonement. I believe in efficacious grace. I believe in the perseverance of the saints. If I have to go through all of these doctrines, that takes time, and you may not be willing to listen. So if I just say, I’m a Calvinist, it’s not because I’m a follower of John Calvin—actually it is a question about whether he believed one of those doctrines, but it’s just a shortcut. It’s kind of a note that will give you at least an insight into what a person believes.

Well, Don Carson said it’s wrong because the focus is wrong. To concentrate on some human being and not on the Lord is wrong. He goes on to say a second reason why it’s wrong to boast about some human leader or other is that it cuts you off from the wad of heritage that is rightfully yours. The fact of the matter is that Calvin’s not only mine, but there are a host of others, even some who held some different viewpoints from Calvin but were right in them and may have expressed them very well. They belong to me, too. The whole body of Christ belongs to me, and even the apostles and others who wrote the Scriptures. So let no man boast in men, he says. I don’t think that means that I cannot mention names, but I think that means not boast in them in the sense that the apostle talks about the Corinthians who were following certain men and not others and infighting among themselves, because he mentions that they were fighting among themselves.

So, the command is, let no one boast in men, preeminence given to men is a sacrilege. Why? Because it diminishes the glory of Christ. We ultimately are to glory in him, and men are simply his

servants. We glory in the master. We glory in him who controls all of them on the Mount of Transfiguration. In Matthew chapter 17 in verse 5 we have a hint of how we are to respond to our Lord in relationship to others, “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” He’s the important one, the apostles are important when they are servants of him, but he is the important one.

In chapter 23 in verse 8 of Matthew there is another text that bears on the point, too. Chapter 23 in verse 8, Our Lord said, But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Messiah, and you are all brethren. So ultimately, we are submissive to him as he has worked in his apostles and caused them to bring us the divine Word. Why? Why should we do this? Why should we never boast in men? Notice again the *for* in verse 21, for all things are yours. You say you belong to Apollos; really the facts are he belongs to you. Not only does Apollos belong to you, all the rest of them belong to you too. You say you’re of Cephas; he belongs to you and all the rest belong to you and so on. In other words, to find your glory in one person is to keep yourself from the benefits of the others. All of them belong to us. We share in the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ ultimately and we benefit from all of those who are servants of the Lord God. We’re not the ultimate owners of anything, God is, and we belong to him. In the stoic literature, the theme that the wise man possesses everything is commonplace but for Paul, the truly wise man is he who has embraced the wisdom of God in Christ.

Now, notice what he says belongs to us, for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come, all are yours. Now, let’s just concentrate for a moment on those five other things. We talked about Paul and Apollos and Cephas. We don’t need them now. We still need Paul of course, but we don’t need Apollos or Cephas—well, we do need Peter. He wrote a couple of epistles. But let’s concentrate on those five things. They are what someone has called the fundamental tyrannies of human life. All things are ours and so, consequently, life is ours, the tyrannies of life.

So the first of the tyrannies is the world. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death. The world. Why the world seeks, if it possibly can, to squeeze us into its mold. Romans 12 is Paul’s warning, Don’t be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That’s a very important text, isn’t it? Do not go and be conformed to the world. We are—I hate to say it. We all are conformed to the world now. It’s remarkable how much we are conformed to the world and yet the Scripture says, Do not be conformed to the world. Those things that the world are interested in, so often we’re interested in. The world’s aims, the world’s goals, they so often are our goals. But, look, the world is ours, he says; similarly, life is ours.

This present life clamors to be treated as if it were worthy of ultimate respect. We cling to life someone has said as if the Bible had never told us that are lives were but vapor that quickly vanishes when the first puff of breeze passes by. We forget that Jesus told us not to fear those that can take away this life, but to fear those who can destroy both soul and body in hell. So this is one of the tyrannies of life, but it really belongs to us.

Death. Ahh, that’s the ultimate threat that hangs over us, isn’t it? Paul says death is ours, but death to us. There isn’t a day that I get up in my latter years that I don’t think about death. I’ve said this to my friends. Every time I catch a cold, I say, is this it [laughter]? Is this it? Is this the way I’m going? I’ve been wondering about that. It’s a kind of tyranny and no one escapes from it, its power extends beyond the experience of it. It looms just over the horizon. It casts its long shadow backward and constrains us all our lives, someone has said. Even if we attempt to live our lives by suppressing the thought, it comes back to us. And if you try to never talk about it, some of your friends will talk about it. Dr. Johnson, you’re certainly looking good. What they mean by that is a man as old as you are [laughter] and has lasted this long. Ahh, but you may die before me. That’s right. You might. The odds are not so good, but you might.

We talk about having life’s goals. What’s your life goal? Well, your life goal often goes right to the end of your life on this earth. That’s what you’re thinking about, isn’t it, your life goal? What you’re going to do while you’re living on this earth? Look, your life goal stretches into eternity, not

just to the life on this earth. Your life goal must have a longer reach, a longer look. Our Lord tells us to lay up treasure in heaven. That's our life goal is heaven and the enjoyment of heaven. And that treasure in heaven reminds me of that question about rewards, too. Lay up treasure for yourself in heaven. Some will have lots, some of us will not have much, but that's our life goal. You might find it hard to heed the admonition, but that's what the Scripture says. And then he mentions the present. There's a constant urgency about the present, but it belongs to me. Things present, things to come, the future. And Paul says, All of these are yours. I find that most comforting, All of these are yours.

Think of it, life, the world, life, death, things present, things to come, all are yours, and then he says—incidentally when he says all are yours, he's talking about the representative principle. All of these things are mine. Why? Because I'm in Christ. He acted for me. He died on the cross for his people. All of them are reckoned to be in him. And all of them are reckoned to be in him in heaven. It's they for whom he prays, not the world, so he said. He prays for them, constantly for them. So by virtue of being in him by federal headship, covenantal headship, all things are mine, the high priest in heaven who is praying for me at this very moment, probably saying, Father, let him not get too far away from the teaching of the Word of God. And then he says, And you're Christ's and Christ is God's. That's an interesting statement, “and Christ is God's.”

The final step in the steps of ownership, Christ is God's. That might seem at first to suggest that there is an inferiority of the Son to the Father, but there are many other reasons why we know that he possesses the divine nature. This is probably a reference to the fact of our Lord's mediatorial relationship. That is, he is the mediator who is still carrying out his mediatory work. We'll talk about that when we get to chapter 15, so that he is mediatorily, he belongs to Christ. He said himself, the Father is greater than I. He didn't mean that as far as his essence was concerned, his being. He meant as the mediator, he was submissive to the Father. And some have suggested that since he is the Son there is always a form of submission throughout eternity. If it is, it is the obedience of perfect love to the perfectly loving will of the Father. I personally think this is the mediatorial relationship he's talking about. He belongs to the Father. He's carrying out his work in submission to him.

How much are we to be submissive to? Well, the folly of the party spirit among the saved, the apostle has underlined, since all God’s messengers in strengths and in weaknesses belong to God and to us. Origen had a statement in his writings that I ran across in Robertson and Plummer’s commentary. They write, “Origen points out that the Greeks had a saying, ‘All things belong to the wise,’ but St. Paul was the first to say, ‘All things belong to the saint.’” That’s true, All things belong to the saint, and he’s the wise.

Well, I began by talking about a compass of moral vision. Well, this is an exquisite compass of vision here, tragically lost when our Christianity only means finding fulfillment in this life or seeking personal peace or, worse yet, it has been said, identifying with the right party or the right Christian guru.

My prayer for us all is that our moral compass may be God’s Word. That is the ultimate moral compass. May it be yours, too. Of course the wisdom of God, remember, is the wisdom of Jesus Christ and him crucified. The acceptance of that message is the way by which we enter through divine grace the family of God and in which relationship all of these things become ours. May that be your experience. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for these words coming to us from the beloved apostle, who was himself met by the Lord on the Damascus Road, had his life transformed by divine grace, gave himself to the proclamation of Jesus Christ. His task was so much greater than ours. Lord, give us grace. Having been met by the gospel and by the Holy Spirit, having been brought to faith in Christ, give us, Lord, the strength, the will, the loving desire to follow thy Word. Make us, Lord, to love the Word, to love the communion, to love the fellowship, to love the life that we have, and then to be useful in our daily life for our family, for our friends, and to those who stand without at this time the one body of the saved, the church of Jesus Christ.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.