



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 9:1–14

1 Corinthians

“Paul’s Right to Compensation”

TRANSCRIPT

I think it is time for us to begin. Let’s open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for the Word of God, and we thank Thee for the gift of the Holy Spirit to teach us and instruct us. We thank Thee for the way in which it ministers to life’s problems. And we thank Thee for the apostle’s letter to the Corinthians, the first of them. For the many things that have to do with us today in 1994 that minister to us the Word of God to which we are ultimately subject, completely and totally.

We ask, Lord, as we read and ponder the things of the Word of God today, that our lives may become more conformable to Thy will, and that Thou wilt enable us, those of us particularly who know our Lord Jesus Christ and desire to serve him, may serve him more effectively, more fruitfully. We thank Thee for the apostle who was such a marvelous instrument in Thy hands, and we know, Lord, that we are ourselves able to be such instruments if Thou wilt direct us to submission and service. We know we shall never be apostles, but, nevertheless, we know that the true submissive service of the believer to our Triune God lies before us as the way of spiritual blessing in this life that Thou hast given to us to live.

We ask for each one present, for our families, for our children, for the ministry of the Word of God here in Believers Chapel, for those who carry on the ministry particularly on Sunday, our

Sunday school teachers, and Dan and others who minister in various ways, our elders and our deacons and the members who are anxious to be of service to Thee, we pray for each one of them.

And for those who have serious trials and tribulations, we ask especially for them. We pray for those who have requested that we pray for them, and we pray that Thou wilt give deliverance in accordance with Thy will. That Thou wilt lead us all in such a way that together we may honor him whose coming we anticipate and look forward to. Help us, Lord, to be fruitful in our service, giving ourselves more whole-heartedly to him who loved us and loosed us from our sins in his own precious blood.

We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] Well, tonight, we are turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 9, and I am going to read verse 1 through verse 14 for our Scripture reading. And our subject is “Paul’s Right to Compensation.” The apostle says in verse 1,

“Am I am not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you: for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who examine me is this. (That indicates, incidentally, that this examining was going on. So, My defense to those who were examining me or judging me is this,) do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I, who have no right to refrain from working? Whoever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock, and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same, also? For it is written in the Law of Moses, you shalt not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does he say it altogether for our sakes?”

Now the word “altogether” is an adverb and it may be translated three or four different ways. It can be translated “surely.” It is translated in the New Testament “altogether.” It occurs about four times in this epistle, and is usually translated differently in the context. So it bears on the interpretation of something, but we don’t have time to deal with it in detail tonight. Verse 10 again,

“Or does he say it altogether for our sakes, for our sakes no doubt, this is written: that he who plows should plow in hope; and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right; but endure all things, lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple? And those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

Now, we know from reading 1 Corinthians chapter 9, and really from 8 through chapter 10, that eating meat sacrificed to idols provoked disputes in Corinth. Some believed that it was a sin, at least not honoring the Lord to eat meats that had been sacrificed to idols. And others had no scruples about it whatsoever. In fact, you remember in chapter 8, verse 1 he says, “We know that we all have knowledge.” And then in verse 7, “How be it there is not in everyone that knowledge.” So there was a dispute over it in Corinth, evidently. What caused it was simply this, that meats were sacrificed to idols and then the meat, after the priests who had offered it took some for themselves and some was given to the god to whom they sacrifice the idols, was often brought into the marketplace and sold, generally. So that raised the question among the Christians, this meat of which we are partaking, which we are buying, may have been meat that was offered to Jupiter or Juno or whoever it may have been among the gods and goddesses. Should we partake of it? And then some were taking the position, well, there are no gods, there is one God, one Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and so it doesn’t really make a whole lot of difference. We may eat them because there are no such gods. But others had scruples about it. And so that evidently is the background, the dispute that was taking place.

The Jews you may remember had ways by which they dealt with things like this, because just as today, things have to be kosher. They had their own ways by which the meats that others were offering would be sanctified, set apart, or in fact, would be killed and eaten according to the principles of the Old Testament law. I’m sure that some of the Gentiles in Corinth who were earnest-believing Christians, said should we not do like the Jews? Should we not have rules for eating and drinking such as are found in the Old Testament, so that we wouldn’t have to eat meat sacrificed to idols? We don’t know specifically that that arose, but I am sure you can see how it would have arisen. So that evidently is the kind of situation that lies in the background.

Now, in chapter 8 the apostle had said that there are strong people who have no scruples. Incidentally, he does call the strong those who do not have the scruples, and those who have the scruples are the weak, because the strong understand what happened when the cross took place, and believers were delivered from the Old Testament law. And so, they felt free to eat such meat, because all things were possible for them to eat. So they were strong in Paul’s words. He regarded himself as one of the strong. Putting Romans 14 together with this one you can see this. But the weak are those who have the scruples. But in chapter 8, he taught the believers there that they should be careful not to violate the consciences of the weak, because if we urge them to eat or they see us eating and follow us eating things that they sense deep down in their heart and conscience is wrong, we are instruments by which they violate their conscience. And thus, they sin even though we don’t sin because they violate their conscience. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” Paul says in that Romans chapter 14 in verse 23 speaking about this. And so it’s possible for me to do something and it would be perfectly all right, and it is possible for you to do something and it would be wrong for you, because it all depends on our conscience and our understanding of the Word of God.

Now, the apostle went on to say, “If you are going in your liberty to cause others to sin, then you should not do that which you are free to do.” And you remember he winds up the chapter, chapter 8 by saying, “But when you thus sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience you sin against Christ, therefore if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat flesh, lest I make my brother stumble.” So in other words, it’s fine to have knowledge, but it’s even more significant to have love for the fellow believers sufficient to bring you to sacrifice something that may be right for you but may be a stumbling block for them.

Now, you might think that when Paul opens chapter 9 and says, “Am I not an apostle, am I not free, have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord, are you not my work in the Lord?” That he is diverging from the subject of meat sacrificed to idols. But if we look on, we’ll notice in chapter 10 for example, near the end of the chapter that he’s still talking about this. For example, he says, You cannot drink the cup of the Lord in the cup of demons, you cannot partake of the Lord’s Table in the table of demons, and so on. So all of these chapters, 8, 9, and 10, have to do with meat sacrificed to idols.

Well, what’s Paul’s point then here? Well, what he’s going to show is to show how a person ought to respond for the benefit of the weak brother by personal sacrifice. And now he’s going to use as an illustration his own apostleship and his right to have the support of the believers for his ministry. But he’s going to say at the end of the chapter—we won’t deal with that tonight, of course, in fact that will be two weeks from tonight, the last part—he’s going to say that he gave up his right to have support for a specific reason. And so he did not exercise his right. So what he is saying is, what I am doing is an illustration, an illustration of what a person should do who is with a brother or a sister who has a weak conscience. And so it’s very important for us to realize that what Paul is saying is that love for the fellow believer is the fundamental motivating force in a believer’s life with reference to his believing brother or sister.

So, he starts out now and talks about the grounds of his apostleship, but it’s going to be a setting forth of this and of his right to support for him to say, “I have used none of these things.”

Verse 15, “But I have used none of these things: nor have I written these things, that it should be done so to me.” So these opening words might seem a bit startling at first, but they are probably provoked by objection to the apostle’s curtailing of his freedom. You can see how someone would say, who is a strong brother and believes that we should eat anything that we feel, that we want to eat because we are not under law but we’re under grace. And seeing the apostle exercising what outwardly appears to be scruples, they would say he doesn’t understand. He doesn’t understand what we understand. Why is he an apostle? We understand what the Scripture teaches on this point more than the apostle. And so probably his actions have provoked that kind of response, and so now they are questioning his apostleship itself.

Now, Paul responds with four very “indignant questions,” someone has said. “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” It’s a very interesting statement when he says here, “Have I not seen Jesus Christ my Lord?” Now, the word that he used is not an unusual word. It means simply “to see.” It’s a reference to the Damascus Road experience, but what he does say is, have I not seen and has that experience not made a lasting impression upon me? The tense of the Greek verb suggests that, being the perfect tense. So he refers to the Damascus Road experience, but he refers to it in such a way as to suggest—in fact, it’s obvious from everything that Paul does elsewhere, to indicate that seeing our Lord on the Damascus Road made an indelible impression upon him, and it was something that never left him. “Have I not seen the Lord?” Not, did I not see the Lord, but, have I not seen him and am I not now a person who has seen him and who well remembers what happened and the effects of seeing our Lord on the Damascus Road?

So, “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” That’s very interesting to me because what he has done, in effect, is to say not only am I free, not only am I an apostle claiming an apostleship, but he gives us the foundation of it. “Have I not seen the Lord?” That was the key thing, to see the risen Lord was one of the key things that brought a man into the apostolate. We know that from the book of Acts. And the apostle

then ranks himself among the ones that we would call the twelve, as one who has seen the Lord. But, now having stated that he has seen the Lord, he reminds the Corinthians that the evidence of it is found in their own conversion, “Are you not my work in the Lord?”

Now, I know that anyone who was in the audience when this epistle was read to them, if it was read in the church meeting as frequently happened in those days, they would have looked around among themselves and they would have immediately sensed the fact, Paul is the one who brought us the gospel. Read the book of Acts chapter 18, you’ll see that. And not only has he brought us the gospel, but we are here because of the Apostle Paul. You are my work in the Lord. So the apostle has, you might say, tremendous leverage as far as they are concerned. They actually are believers because of his work of preaching the gospel. Notice he calls them “my work in the Lord.” So the apostle claims them for himself, remember he had said back in chapter 4 that he had been the instrumentality by which they had been brought to the knowledge of the Lord. So it’s not surprising then that he should say that they are his work, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ yet you do not have many fathers for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” So they looked around among themselves and they would know of course that Paul had great leverage with respect to preaching the gospel to them. They had a firsthand knowledge of Jesus Christ because of the one who is writing this letter to them. We know, of course, all Christianity begins with a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not begin when we acknowledge a certain creed and say, I accept the creed. It doesn’t begin in the water of baptism necessarily. It might. It’s conceivable that it might happen at that point, but the fundamental fact is that the person who truly knows the Lord is one who has a personal relationship to him, personal.

Now my wife and I have a relationship to the Lord, but I have a relationship to the Lord. There was a time when I personally thanked God in heaven for the gift of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins that comes from faith in him wrought in my heart by God the Holy Spirit. If I do not have that, I do not have Christianity. Thomas Carlisle once said when a minister was being chosen, “What this church needs is someone who knows Christ other than at second hand.” How

true that is. We have many churches today in which that is true. Many ostensibly evangelical churches in which the minister does not know God at first hand, but at second hand. And so, consequently, the result is the church is not really a functioning, fruitful New Testament body.

He says also, “If I’m not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” If you want to know why I am an apostle, look at yourself. That’s why I’m an apostle. Here is a church that has come into existence through the preaching of the gospel. I am an apostle. This is the seal of my apostleship.

Now, we know what a seal is, and a seal acted similarly in ancient times. People who are in business when they sold their goods they sealed them up in containers to put them on ships, and then they put a seal on them which was designed to identify and guarantee the contents. If a man made a will for example, his will was sealed with seven seals. We read about that in Revelation chapter 5. In fact, that’s the key to Revelation chapter 5 to understand that that seven-sealed book is a will. And so here, “You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” You are the guarantee that I am an apostle. The man whom I lead to the Lord is a guarantee that I’m one of his servants, that I’ve been used by him. That’s the final guarantee of the service of the Lord.

It wouldn’t be selfish for us to say to our fellow believers, is there evidence that you are a true believer? Have you been used by the Lord to bring someone else to the knowledge of him? That’s the work that we are called upon to do. We are called to witness for him. All of us, not simply someone who stands behind a desk like this, pulpit desk. But all of us who sit in a congregation like this who claims to be our Lord’s. We are responsible to give the gospel to those with whom we come in contact. And if we give the gospel and pray about it, we may truly expect that God will use our words in the salvation of others. So the ground of his apostleship then is the sight that he had of our Lord on Damascus Road, the Damascus Road when the Lord Jesus called him to be his apostle and the evidence of the fruitfulness of the work of this man.

Now, evidently the apostle had been challenged in spite of that. It’s hard for me today to understand how anyone could challenge the Apostle Paul, that there actually should be a movement

challenging him. Now, I can understand why people challenge me. I can understand when they hear Johnson preaches his Calvinism that they want to challenge things. That’s all right; that’s their right. They can challenge. I’m not an apostle. I’m trying to be a follower of an apostle. I think I have the best of the argument if they’ll listen. If I didn’t think that, I would have some other position.

But to be an apostle is something else and to think of a church that is brought into existence by the preaching of this man to challenge him—well, the Bible tells us we are sinners, and we have ample evidences of it in the activities of the believing people. It’s astonishing really that our Christian churches are so filled with objections to simple servants of the Lord who are seeking to preach the Word of God, but who may not have quite the kind of success that someone else has down the street or across the city or across the state. And the criticisms that occur are criticisms that are remembered in heaven and are remembered at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, and it’s well for us to remember that, all of us, because we are all guilty of that kind of thing.

So now Paul will defend himself, and he’s going to give us a number of reasons why he has the right for their support. In other words, he has the right to tell them, you should support me financially. And so we’ll look at them.

First of all, verse 3 and 4, “My defense to those who are examining me is this, do we have no right to eat and drink?” Now, I’m just going to suggest that when he says eat and drink here that he’s not talking about the things that he will say throughout the rest of this section. That is, eat and drink, eat meat sacrificed to idols. I’m going to take this in a general sense. I’m not sure that this is correct. You are free to criticize me here. You won’t hurt my feelings. But I’m suggesting that this is the freedom to eat and drink as he pleased, because he knows the Law of Moses has been done away with, and now he is responsible for the service of our Lord by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to follow that which the Holy Spirit teaches him. Some objective guides are the teaching of the apostles and of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he’s not under the Law of Moses.

Now, I’ve been talking like I’m dogmatic, haven’t I? I’ve been trying to inject a little bit of the apostolic dogmatism in it. The world has little use for people without convictions when—for

example, when your child becomes very, very sick and you want to call a doctor, you don’t call a doctor who is open-minded about personal disease, do you? Or we don’t send our children to school if we know the teachers are open-minded about the multiplication tables and things like that. We don’t do that. We want someone that we have confidence in and the apostle speaks as one in whom we can have confidence because he knew that God had been with him in a marvelous way.

So he expresses, first of all, his freedom, I believe, to eat and drink anything. That is any kind of food or any kind of drink. I would suggest—I’m not trying to invite you to do it, but I would suggest that this is reason why it’s possible for a believing person to take a glass of wine without being criticized by others. Drunkenness, that’s something else. The Bible speaks very plainly about that. When I was living in Europe, it’s the first time I was over there—it was, I knew about this because people had told me about it, but of course in Europe, in Switzerland, the finest of the believers, really the fine wheat of the Church of Jesus Christ in that country, sit down at their meals in the middle of the day and everybody has a glass of wine. And that evening everyone has a glass of wine. No drunkenness, but they didn’t have any reason for saying you could not have a glass of wine. As a matter of fact, we know in the New Testament they did drink wine. So when the apostle says, do we not have the right to eat and drink, that would be covered by that.

Now, he goes on to say something that’s rather surprising in verse 5, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord and Cephas.” In other words, the other men who were apostles, they traveled with their wives. Now, I’m glad they put “and Cephas” there, because we know that Cephas or Peter had a mother-in-law. We know that from Matthew chapter 8, verse 14. So, the first Pope had a mother-in-law. [Laughter] Isn’t that interesting? The first Pope, of course, by Roman Catholic claims, we don’t know that, but they think that. He had a mother-in-law, and there’s evidence here that others too apparently traveled, the other apostles, with wives.

And the apostle says that the churches are responsible for the support not simply of him but of the wives as well. So his freedom to have a wife and travel about and to receive support in the

ministry as the other apostles, as the brothers of the Lord and Cephas. Verse 6: Or is it not only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? He has a freedom not to work in the ministry. That’s plainly what he says. Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? In other words, he saying I have the right to be supported by the church of Jesus Christ and to be supported with my wife and to be supported without working. That is my right. So he has freedom to have a wife and receive support. He has a freedom not to work.

Now, we know of course that the apostle did work. We know, for example, in this very epistle, I believe, in chapter 4, doesn’t he say something in connection with that? “And we labor working with our own hands, being reviled we bless, being persecuted we endure.” I won’t talk about the other places because it will come up again, but there are other places where he refers to his working, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and Acts chapter 18 and Acts chapter 20. In all of these places, he lays stress upon the fact that he worked. Why? Well, because it was something that he did voluntarily. He didn’t have to do it, but he did it voluntarily as he will tell us that he might gain a reward by going what might be called an extra mile in the service of our Lord. Can’t help but admire a man like the apostle, whose a man whole-heartedly given to the Lord, trusting the Lord, not trusting the saints, trusting the Lord giving himself to the work of the Lord and looking to him only and finding at times he had to work because the saints didn’t support him as they should have perhaps but, nevertheless, not doing anything other than serving our Lord completely.

Now, another right he speaks of in verse 7: “Whoever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?” This has been called the principle of common right. If we are doing these things, we have a right to partake of the fruit of our work. And then in verse 8 through verse 10, he talks about the law itself, “Do I say these things as a mere man or does not the law say the same, also? For it is written in the Law of Moses: ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ even the ox, as it’s treading out the grain.” The Jews were exhorted, commanded not to put a muzzle on the ox,

that the ox had the right to eat some of the grain that they themselves were treading out. So that’s the apostle’s point.

Now, he says in verse 10, “Or does he say it all together for our sakes. For our sakes no doubt this is written that he who plows should plow in hope and he who thrashes in hope should be partaker of his hope.”

Now, I’m going to come back to that in a moment. So we will move on to—this is simply the teaching of the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses he said supports compensating those who minister to us the Word of God. Being the instrumentality bringing us to the knowledge of the Lord, we are responsible to support them. I’m not leading up to asking you for some money, incidentally. [Laughter] Never have asked anybody for money in the Lord’s work. I don’t believe in that. I don’t think that that’s right, for me. I won’t say for anyone else, but for me.

Now, he talks about the right of holy ministry in verse 11 through verse 13. “If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? In other words, we have been sowing spiritual life to you through the preaching of the Word of God, God himself doing the work, of course. Is it a great thing if we reap your material things? We are means of spiritual blessing to us. You, he suggests, should help us in meeting our material needs. “If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?” Evidently some were claiming that right, and the apostle reminds them that he has the top rights. He’s the one who is the one who is responsible for the church at Corinth. Nevertheless, we have not used this right but endure all things, lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar.

Now, we know that of course in the Old Testament, the Levitical priests carried out the ministry, and they were supported by the children of Israel, the other tribes. They were supported by the tithe. The tithe was not a gift. The tithe was income tax. They had to pay a tenth to the support of the priests, and so the priests carried on the work of the Lord, and they were supported by the children of Israel because they were taxed, ten percent. Clinton hasn’t brought that up yet. But

nevertheless, in the Old Testament that’s the way it was done. The Old Testament speaks of tithes and offerings. Offerings were in addition to the tithe. Tithe was income tax. It’s so amazing to me, so amazing to me that we can hear ministry to the effect that we ought to give tithes. Tithes are the big thing in most of our churches, tithes. If you’ll just simply take your concordance out and look at the New Testament and look up the term “tithe,” and you’ll see that it is never used of anything other than something that happened as history, as history, not now.

I remember my father, when the church in Charleston was putting up a new addition, First Presbyterian Church there, the Old Scots Church. And it was later on (I had been a minister of the gospel for a good time) and we had a number of talks. He was an elder in the church, and he handed me the literature. And he said, “Well, what do you think about this? Do you think—what do you think he was implying what I thought he should give? Well, I wasn’t going to give him any advice at all, but I read the material. And it was an appeal to the members of the First Presbyterian Church of Charleston to give for the new addition. Tithes was mentioned I don’t know how many times. I may still have that in my—in my notes somewhere. I thought it was a good illustration. I could use it in preaching.

But tithes, tithes were mentioned, and I had an opportunity to mention to my father that, as far as the tithe is concerned, the tithe is an Old Testament income tax. And I do know that he happened to give an offering. He told me later, he had given an offering. But we just, I feel, after all these years as old as I am, the biggest mistake made in a local church is failure to read the Bible, failure to read the Bible. The elders, deacons, and members, failure to read the Bible. Expect others to do it for us. Let Dr. Johnson tell us what the Bible has to say. No. If it depended on me, somewhere you’d go wrong because I’d go wrong somewhere. But read the Bible.

Now, he winds up in verse 14 by saying even so the Lord commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. This probably refers—I say perhaps, I guess I should say—perhaps refers to the statement in Luke chapter 10 in verse 7 in which our Lord makes reference to this possible thing. He says in Luke chapter 10 in verse 7—I think it’s verse 7, yes—

“Remain in the same house eating and drinking such things as they give for the laborer is worthy of his wages.” What is called by scholars a *{logion}*, something said by the Lord. And this is found again, incidentally, in 1 Timothy chapter 5 in verse 18. 1 Timothy 5:18 says this, “For the Spirit says you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Ah, that’s our text again, the one that is used here. The one from Deuteronomy chapter 25, “And so then and the laborer is worthy of his wages.”

So that the command of the Lord is the final reason that he gives for others supporting the ministry, commandment of the Lord. I had in my notes a reference to an old Connecticut pastor who declined to increase his salary, to have his salary increased, and he explained to his congregation why he didn’t accept the increase that had been proposed for his sermon, for his ministry. He said first because you can’t afford to pay me any more, and second because my preaching isn’t worth more than I presently receive, and thirdly because I have to collect my salary which heretofore has been the hardest part of my labors among you, and if I have to collect an additional sum it will kill me.

[Laughter] So he decided he would turn down that increase.

Now, I want to come back just for the few minutes that we have to the statement made in verse 8 through verse 10 which is the citation of Deuteronomy 25:4.

“Do I say these things as a mere man, or does not the law say the same thing also, for it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. Is it oxen, God is concerned about or does he say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes no doubt, this is written that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.”

This text has caused a great deal of confusion, because it has been suggested by a number of people that Paul has misused the Old Testament. That really the application of this text to the situation, as Paul does here, is contrary to the Old Testament, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it

treads out the grain,” what does that have to do with apostles? And so many have suggested that the apostle found something here in the Bible that was not really there.

I remember, this is about fifteen—well, it’s more that fifteen years ago. I left Dallas Seminary seventeen years ago, and it was two or three years before I left, so we’ll say twenty years ago. Commencement was held at one of the large churches in downtown Dallas. I won’t mention the name because it doesn’t have anything to do with the church, we just rented the auditorium. It was a large crowd. We had as a speaker, a president of a Christian college on the coast. In fact, it was the president of Talbot, not Talbot Seminary, but the college associated with it, Biola. The speaker in the midst of the message that he gave said something that so disturbed me, I wrote it down. And this is what he said. He referred to the apostle Paul as a man, quote—this is precisely what he said, “Who got more out of the Old Testament Scriptures than the Holy Spirit put in them.” [Laughter] Now, this is a man who is the president of a college supposedly, a college that believes in the inspiration of the Word of God and the inerrancy of the Word of God. He later went on to be president of Wheaton College. Richard Chase is his name. He’s retired now, I think. But it is obvious a man who is president, who believes things like this, is not going to push the things that matter most in a Christian institution. So Paul found things in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit did not put there and then uses them in an argument, how could anyone believe that? I was astonished. No one thought anything. No one ever said anything to me about it, except that I talked to two or three people after and said yes that was kind of bad, wasn’t it? They never got it. I happened to be interested in the use of the Old Testament and the New Testament, so I immediately picked up on that and wrote it down specifically. I wasn’t going to let that get by me and then say I think I remember him saying something like this. I wanted to be sure precisely what he said.

When I was at the University of Edinburgh on a sabbatical about ten years ago, one of the professors in dogmatics, he’s a man who’s just retired. He’s been teaching all that time since. He made reference to this passage here in chapter 9 in verses 8 through 10. He was talking about the way in which the fathers use the Old Testament, and then the way the apostle used the Old Testament.

He mentions Paul specifically and this is what he said, I wrote it down, too. “You’ll get fed up with the way the fathers treat the Old Testament. And you’ll get fed up with the way Paul does, too. Take the incident of 1 Corinthians 9, Paul talks there about the oxen and other things, that was rather naughty of Paul.” Isn’t that interesting? This man is an Anglican, isn’t evangelical, that is, by profession. Naughty of Paul. Well, we’ll see who’s naughty.

Dewey Beegle, another Christian, professing Christian evangelical, says, “It’s not necessary that men who cite the Old Testament cite it accurately, just so long as the truth that is said to be found in them is ‘essential truth.’ It doesn’t matter whether the sense claimed in the New Testament for the Old Testament text is really there.” Why it matters a great deal. If the apostles cannot cite the Old Testament accurately and set forth the truth that is truly taught in the Old Testament, how can they be relied upon in other matters as well?

Lord Bacon, who was not a religious man to my knowledge, authored an aphorism regarding the interpretation of legal documents that bears directly on the interpretation of the biblical records as well. He said, “Interpretation that departs from the letter of the text is not interpretation but divination.” That’s precisely what it is. It’s you adding things to the text as if you are an authority like the Lord God in heaven, the divine being.

Now, many modern commentators say simply that for Paul, the literal significance of the text here had no significance at all. Luther has a cute little comment. He said, “The passage is not for oxen, for oxen cannot read.” [Laughter] And of course that’s true; I agree with Luther there, that’s not for oxen. And Luther wanted to go on and make further application of it. And in that sense he was probably correct. But there are commentators who insist that what Paul states here is simply that the Old Testament justifies support of apostles and that’s all, that God doesn’t care about the oxen at all. Well, we must remember that the animal world—we are living in interesting days, aren’t we? The animal world was created for man, for man. Let us not forget that, for man.

So when he says here, “You shall not muzzle the ox while it treads out the grain,” he’s not saying the oxen have no significance whatsoever. They are there for men. But the instruction that is

given here, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” is a reference to the fact that the oxen are for man’s benefit, but also they are morally under the government of God, and God cares for them in the place in which he has put them in his creation. This text doesn’t say he doesn’t care for the oxen at all. It’s a question of primarily, but he does care for the oxen. But primarily he had the moral sense of the text in mind when he wrote, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” In other words, the ox, because of his work, is due to be supported by it. And this expresses a moral truth which has application to the apostles.

So it is not written directly to the apostles. This has application for them. In fact, in 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 17 and 18, we have the same text quoted for the same reason. Here we read these words. I’ll read them for you. “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” Evidently, two kinds of elders: those who rule and those who rule and labour in the word and doctrine; that is, who have gifts of ministry. That’s the reason the Presbyterian church—and I think they are right in this—talk about ruling elders and teaching elders. They both rule, but one teaches and the others rule. All rule but one may have special gifts of ministry. “For,” he says, “the Scripture saith, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. And, the laborer is worthy of his wages.”

So here then, elders who rule well should be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine, because this text supports the application that the apostle makes of it. So the animal creation exists for man’s benefit and the principle finds application in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, the valid moral sense. Who’s naughty? No, Paul’s not naughty. Paul’s correct. It’s Cannon Walls who is naughty and tried to make it appear to us a kind of a joke that Paul is naughty by the fact that he doesn’t use the Bible correctly. He should have known better. Let me tell you this: I have never yet known a theology professor who had a knowledge of the Word of God in its details that could come close to the knowledge of the Word of God that the apostles have. So I must say that after fifty years of listening to them, if you want to listen to the real thing, listen to the authors of Scripture. Our Lord and his apostles—they know the Word of God.

One of my students years ago at the seminary here—so it was back before seventeen years and I was teaching. This particular section and came to this verse, so it was about twenty-five years ago, probably. I made reference to the fact that Paul mentions 25:4 here and he mentions it again in 1 Timothy chapter 5. And one of the students said, Do you think that 1 Timothy chapter 5—or rather Deuteronomy chapter 25 in verse 4, do you think that was Paul’s life verse? He said that with a smile on his face because everybody had their life verses, and he was just saying it jokingly. He quoted it twice, so I said something about Paul evidently really liked this text, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. He said, “Do you think that was Paul’s life verse?” And then I wrote afterwards in an outburst of uncommon sharpness, I said, No, but perhaps it’s the life verse of the oxen. [Laughter]

Now, there was one final thing I’d like to make before we go on. I want you to know what Paul thinks about the Bible. That was a little too sharp for you, wasn’t it? [Laughter] I know it’s late in the evening, some of you are sleepy. You are thinking about getting in the bed at ten o’clock. I don’t get in bed until one, one thirty. I’m fresh. I had a nap this afternoon. All right. One final word, an important observation concerning the inspiration of Scripture in the 9th verse. He says, “For it is written in the Law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Is it oxen Moses is concerned about? Is that what the text says? No. Is it oxen God is concerned about? The text says it’s written in the Law of Moses. Paul says, “Is it oxen God is concerned about?” It doesn’t take any intelligence much at all, does it, to see what Paul has done is to say the Law of Moses is really the voice of the true speaker, the Lord God. The Law of Moses is the Law of God. The Old Testament text is the Old Testament text of God. The Bible is God’s Word from beginning to end, though authored by many different authors. We could talk about this a lot, but our time is up, and we have to stop.

What a great passage this is. Reminds us of so many things that are found in the Word of God. So interesting to see how the apostles put themselves under the supervision of the Word of

God, considered the Scriptures to be the Word of God, and sought by God’s grace to live conformably to that Word. May God enable us to do that.

For those in this audience who may not know our Lord, it’s of special significance for you to be reminded of the fact that Christ, the Son of God, died for sinners. You and I are sinners. The gospel is preached to all. The invitation is given to you to come to him. If you don’t come, it’s your responsibility. You cannot say I was not elected. For here is an opportunity to settle the question about whether you are elect or not. I could not tell you. But if you don’t come you have no excuse, because you have the opportunity to come to him. May God touch your heart to that end if you don’t know him.

For those of us who do know him, and I’m sure that most, if not all, who are here, I say I’m sure—I’m not sure, I think. For those who may be here who do not know the Lord, well, that’s a decision for you. For those of us who do, submission to the Word of God is the next step in the happy life and the glorious life and the rewarding and fruitful life that is offered us in the Word of God. Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this Word. We thank Thee for our Lord Jesus Christ, his sufferings, his concern for us, for me, for us individually, for his concern at the present time as our great high priest. We thank Thee.

And for any who may be in this audience who have not yet the knowledge of the Son of God in their hearts, Lord may at this moment, they be bowing their hearts before Thee and saying I thank Thee for the savior of sinners. I need him. Lord, I’m coming for the forgiveness of sins through Christ apart from the works of the law, purely through divine gift of grace.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.