



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 3:1–6

“Ministers of the New Covenant.”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture passage for today is 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 1 through verse 6. And I'm reading again from the New American Standard Bible, which is the version that we are using primarily in the exposition of 2 Corinthians. Chapter 3, verse 1 through verse 6.

Now, remember as the last section concluded, the apostle had said, “We are not like the many, adulterating the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” That might seem as if the apostle were engaging in a little bit of bragging as an apostolate. So it's not surprising that verse 1 begins in chapter 3,

“Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for or ministered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a

new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

I’d like to, before we have our time of prayer, say just a word about those last words in verse 6 which have so often been misunderstood. The apostle says, “For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” Paul has not contrasted the literal and figurative interpretations of the word of God as if he is suggesting that we shouldn’t take the Bible in its literal or normal sense, but rather we should find a spiritual sense there. That has been the ground of a great deal of misinterpretation of the word of God and also the ground of a great deal of accusation of those who take the Bible at its normal sense as failing to use the Bible properly in their interpretation.

The apostle is not saying one must go deeper than the letter and observe the spirit of the law. He simply says that the law cannot give life. For the term “letter” is a reference to the Law of Moses. And as the context makes very plain, the apostle is speaking about the writing of the Ten Commandments on the tables of stone. That’s the letter, and the letter is the law. And so when he says the letter kills, he means that the office of the law as given by God, we may say for purposes of simplicity, the Ten Commandments were given not to save but to bring us to the conviction of our sin and, therefore, of our need for savior, our certain spiritual death if we did not turn to Christ. So when he says “For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life,” he is speaking about the nature and purpose and intent of the giving of the Mosaic Law. So many times this text is cited, usually by people who are not very deep students of the word, rather superficial students citing the text sometimes out of context and often misunderstanding what the apostle is referring to.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we approach Thee through Christ as the apostle has just suggested in the statements that he made to the Corinthians in his second letter to them. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege that we have as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to come to Thee as the children of God, and know that Thou art our Father who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, according as Thou hast chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him.

We thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast purposed that we should ultimately be like him and we look forward to the day in which the work of justification is climaxed in the work of glorification. In the meantime, Lord, we pray that Thou wilt enable us by Thy grace to serve Thee acceptably and fruitfully. We are thankful for the privilege that is ours in Believer’s Chapel. We give the thanks for the ministry of the word of God, not only from the pulpit and in our classes in the Sunday school, but also through the tapes and through the radio ministry and through the Bible classes that are held by individuals who teach among us. We are grateful and thankful. We pray Thy blessing upon the radio ministry as it goes forth today and in the future. May it be very fruitful.

We pray for the ministry in Birmingham and then in the Philadelphia area and Colorado Springs. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt bless and may a number come to know him to know his life eternal, and may the Christians in those areas find ministry of the word of God that will be helpful in building them up in their faith. We thank Thee for those who’ve requested our prayers. We pray for them. We ask Thy blessing upon them, sustain them and keep them, deliver them from their trials and distresses.

We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt make very plain to them that Thou art a Father to the saints of God and therefore we can call upon Thee for help in our times of distress. We commit them to Thee. We pray for our elders and our for deacons, members and friends, and the visitors, particularly who are here with us today. May the word of God be edifying and build us all up in our faith.

And for those who may be here who do not have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, may, as we leave this meeting they, too, have the assurance of belonging to Him whom to know is life eternal. We pray for our country, for the whole church of Jesus Christ as well.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is taken from the language of the Authorized Version, “Ministers of the New Covenant.” You’ll notice that in the 6th verse of the New American Standard Bible those phrases are rendered as servants of a new covenant, but the term “servant” is the term that means essentially a minister. And so “Ministers of the New Covenant” is our title. 2 Corinthians, we have been saying, distinguishes itself for three things: First its matchless discussion of ministry. That term or its cognates, related terms, occurs about twenty times in 2 Corinthians. And so the apostle is concerned with the subject of ministry.

In fact, the section that we are dealing with is a section in which the apostle is explaining his ministry as an apostle, as a minister of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had been very concerned. And when finally word had come to him that the Corinthians had responded to a letter, he breaks out in this magnificent praise of the ministry of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It begins in chapter 2, verse 12, and then does not conclude until chapter 7 in verse 5.

And if you are reading 2 Corinthians at all, I hope you will, you will notice that that section is a unity and the apostle comes back to his point in chapter 7, verse 5, “For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side, conflicts without, fears within, but God who comforts the depressed comforted us by the coming of Titus.”

Throughout this section various aspects of the ministry of the gospel are set forth. He speaks, for example, in chapter 4 in verse 4 of the glorious gospel of Christ. Now,

again, the New American Standard Bible has it slightly differently, has it as the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, but the same thought is there, the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther once said, we preach always Him. It may seem a limited and monotonous subject, but we’re never at the end of it. I think any true gospel preacher can sympathize with the words of Luther, because the heart of the message of Christianity is the Lord Jesus Christ and all of the various aspects of his ministry. And the man who has come to understand the grace of God in Christ will truly never be at the end of it.

The second of Paul’s distinguishing doctrines is its revolutionary discussion of Christian giving given us in chapters 8 and 9. And I dare say that if we, as Christians, paid attention to the things that Paul says about Christian giving in chapters 8 and 9, a great deal of the nonsensical activity engaged in by Christians today would be eliminated. And in fact, we would have a good test by which to judge the Biblical foundations of Christian ministries. As we’ll point out later on, it’s very possible today for people with the proper skills in communication and skills in solicitation to make it appear that the ministry that they are engaged in is a ministry that has received the blessing of God when, in fact, it has not. So the apostle’s words in chapters 8 and 9 will give us, I think, a great deal of help in understanding the subject of Christian giving.

The third of the topics of 2 Corinthians is Paul’s stern admonition against his Jerusalem adversaries. Christians, who had come into the church in Corinth after he had left and were stirring up the people in that assembly there, telling them that the apostle was not truly an apostle like the twelve, and, consequently, overthrowing some of Paul’s work, disturbing the believers there. The apostle refers to these individuals later on in chapter 11 in verse 13 where he says, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness whose end shall be according to their deeds. It’s

clear from this that they really were Judaizing non-Christians who also have made their way, it seems to me, into the assembly in Corinth.

And so the apostle will speak directly regarding them in a sense warning the Christians in Corinth that if, as my old teacher used to say -- if you are looking for Satan, be sure and look in the pulpit because it’s there where he may be found. Unfortunately, that’s true and, unfortunately, simple-minded Christians think that the last place that they could find an emissary of the evil one is behind a Bible in a professing Christian pulpit. And that, of course, is exactly why Satan does it that way. If he can do it that way, then, of course, he has a much easier time in impressing the minds of those who are listening.

Now, Paul has shown us the triumph and tragedy of the ministry in the last few verses of Chapter 2. As he broke out into his peonage praise for God’s blessing upon the ministry, he said, “Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place; for we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” The triumph, we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved. The tragedy, we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are perishing.

As John Calvin said, as I mentioned two weeks ago, the gospel is never preached in vain even though there are people who do not receive it. It is not preached in vain. And so Paul talks about it. He talks about how the double response is to be expected, divisions occur when the gospel is proclaimed. If the message called the gospel of Christ is preached and there is no division then we need to check our message to be sure that it is in harmony with the word of God.

Now, Paul is going to develop the supremacy of the gospel ministry and particularly the supremacy of the ministry of the new covenant as over against the ministry of the old covenant. And he will do this because the men who are opposing him are men who have laid too much stress upon the ministry of the old covenant and have not understood the ministry of the new covenant. In fact, Paul is not adverse to calling

such people dogs, as in Philippians chapter 3 in verse 2 referring to just such men. He calls them dogs. Well, the dogs are still dogging him. And so Paul, in this great exposition of ministry, will seek to clarify the message.

Now, you’ll notice there were people who were there bothering him, because in verse 17 of chapter 2 he says, “But for we are not like the many adulterating the word of God.” And then again in chapter 3 verse 1 he says, “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again or do we need as some letters of commendation to you or from you?” So the apostle is fully aware that there are many who are out there making claims, and they are not true to the message.

You can see how Paul might have wanted to reply to the charge of egotism if you read the first epistle. For in the first epistle twice the apostle tells the Corinthians to be followers of him. In 1 Corinthians 4 in verse 16 he said, “I exhort you, therefore be imitators of me.” And people who didn’t like Paul could easily pick that up and say, “Here is a man telling us to follow him. We are supposed to follow the Lord God are we not?”

In chapter 11, verse 1 the apostle says, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” And that would blunt the one criticism, but then one could say now here is a man who tells us to follow him and then claims that he’s following Christ. Can you imagine that? So the apostle, no doubt, had to defend himself against the charges of egotism. Whenever anyone defends himself against anything, he lays himself open to just such a charge.

So he asks the question then, “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again or do we need as some letters of commendation to you or from you?” I like that reference to letters of commendation because I think that there’s still a usefulness for letters of commendation. Although I must confess, not quite as necessary as in the early days of the Christian church because communications is different today and, therefore, it would be more difficult for an individual to travel around and make hay off of the believers. But

at any rate, the early church used the practice evidently of carrying letters of commendation so that if one traveled from Ephesus to Corinth from the church in Ephesus would be a brief letter introducing the individual, explaining something about his membership in the assembly in Ephesus, and commending him for his Christian testimony. So as he entered into the church in Corinth, he would be permitted and welcomed to sit at the Lord’s Table and observe the Lord’s Supper with them.

The fact that they were necessary is shown by one of the early apostates, a man by the name of Lucien who said, “An adroit unscrupulous fellow who has seen the world has only to get among these simple-hearted Christians, and he can soon make a fortune out of them. Now, Lucien said that many centuries ago, but that is precisely what has happened today. There are adroit individuals who are on our T.V. screens and over the radio, I don’t think Believer’s Bible Hour qualifies since we make no appeals for funds at all, and people believe us too because we don’t send any money to speak of. [Laughter] But there are people out there who are, in my opinion, dishonestly leading to think that to support them is to support the gospel of Christ in its purity. And simple-hearted Christians, that’s really a testimony, of course, to the facts of the gospel. That is the gospel does generally have a softening influence upon an individual when it is responded to, and there are many untaught, simple-minded, immature people who have been brought to the knowledge of the Lord and are grateful, so grateful for the forgiveness of sins that they do not exercise discernment and examine the works that they support. It’s too bad, but nevertheless it’s true. The apostle refers evidently to some like that.

He says in the 2nd verse and 3rd verse answering his question, “You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men.” The Corinthian’s inward authentication to Paul of the genuineness of his ministry is reflected in that statement. “You are our letter written in our hearts.”

Now, there are some textual questions here, but I’m expounding the New American Standard Bible. I think it is probably to be preferred, and if so this is what Paul

means. He means that if you want to know how authentic my ministry is to me as I look out and as I see the response of the word in you, the clear response to the gospel of Christ, you are my letter. You have been written in my heart. I have seen how you have responded to the message of the gospel, and it’s that kind of letter that I stand behind. I do not need a letter of commendation for someone to write, “Paul is a good Christian man. He expounds the word of God everywhere. Please receive him.” I have gone there, I have preached the gospel, and you have come to faith. You are my letter. I don’t need something written like other people coming. You have already been written by the Holy Spirit as a letter justifying the ministry that I have preached.

Now, he will go on in a few moments to truthfully and faithfully say, it’s not from me ultimately, it’s from the Lord that this has taken place. But that’s the first thing he says that the Corinthians response is an inward authentication to him of the genuineness of his own ministry.

Everybody who ever preaches the gospel and has people say to him, you have been the means of bringing me to the knowledge of the Lord is encouraged thereby to think that what he has been preaching is truly of God. That’s a tremendous encouragement in the ministry of the word of God. So that’s what Paul means, first of all. But then he goes on to say, “Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God.” And at the end of verse 2 he had said “Known and read by all men.”

So the Corinthians’ outward authentication to all men is seen in the way in which that church has responded to the gospel. So when the gospel came and men were born again. That, to Paul, was an inward authentication of the truthfulness of his ministry and an outward authentication to all men of the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I like this expression that the apostle uses. He says that “You are our letter.” And in verse 3 he says, “Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ.” The local church is likened to a letter, that is, a means by which one can communicate to someone else.

Now, we all like a letter that is legible. A letter that is not legible, that’s of no use. And even those that are not so legible are sometimes a trial to read. Have you ever received a letter like that? Why of course you’ve received letters like that. This past week I received a letter from an individual in Toronto listening to our Buffalo station. This man went on -- I think it was a man, this man went on to talk about how he had listened to the station for a long time. He said our whole area up here is starved for the exposition of the word of God. Mind you, millions of people in the Toronto area, in Toronto itself, over two million people. In the environs of that area I don’t know how many people are involved there. But here is a man, a Christian man, and obviously from the letter one who had been in many churches or at least was acquainted with many churches saying that their area was starved for the exposition of the word of God.

Then he went on to say that he had been listening for three or four years and also listening to our tapes. It was a very encouraging letter. It was in a sense an inward authentication of what we were trying to say. But he also enclosed a gift, and so I thought, well, it would be nice to write him just a personal note and tell him how much I appreciated that letter. But then I looked at his signature. Now I consider myself pretty much an expert in reading signatures. For forty years having taught in theological seminary and having observed all kinds of handwriting, there are very few of them that I cannot ultimately transcribe. Now, it may be a matter of some time, I’ve received many exam papers in which I had to start out and say okay now where is an A and where is a B and where is a C and construct the alphabet as this person is writing it, and then from that translate the exam. Occasionally you just have to call them in and say, look, I can’t read your exam, please tell me what you are saying on this piece of paper so I can grade it.

Well at any rate, when I looked at his man’s signature, I looked all over the letter for identifying letters; I couldn’t find any in it. I don’t know the name of that individual, and I thought it would be rather unfriendly to address it occupant [Laughter] at such and

such and thank him for listening to the ministry of the word. So I really don’t know exactly how to do this. At any rate, the point is if we’re a letter of Christ, we ought to be legible, and people who attend the chapel who claim that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ or any of you who constantly attend other churches who happen to be here today, you represent an epistle of Christ if you come from a church that is a Christian church and the church should be legible. I should be informative. His letter was informative. It just wasn’t legible when we got to the conclusion of the letter. And it should be attractive. The presence of Christ’s Messianic Kingdom discerned even amid the shadows of our fallen and temporal world in redeeming in sanctifying operation of the sovereign spirit of God is a marvelous thing. And to look out over an audience like this or a larger audiences and see people who have really responded to the gospel of Christ in nineteen eighty-seven is truly an inspiring thing. It’s an instance of -- that is, a proof of the power of the ancient gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul says in the 3rd verse, “Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered for, by us.” Now, that reminds us of verse 14 above in chapter 2, “Thanks be to God who always leads us in his triumph in Christ and manifests by us,” the same Greek expression, “by us the sweet savior of the knowledge of him.” So the apostle is not suggesting that he is the origin of this attractive, legible, informative epistle. It’s something God’s doing through his servants.

H. A. Ironside used to like to say it takes the whole church to make his epistle, but each one of us is one little verse in that epistle. So what kind of message are you giving as you give testimony to your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul goes on to say writing from the standpoint of the new covenant in verse 3, “But with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone like the Mosaic Law on Mount Sinai, but on tablets of human hearts.” Internal law giving is characteristic of the age today. You see, by having the Holy Spirit come to dwell within us and having him as our guide and having as our

standard the word of God ministered to us through the Holy Spirit, there has been an internal law giving to us.

It’s very important that we recognize that the moral law of the Old Testament is continued in the New Testament age with one or two minor exceptions. That is, we don’t observe the Sabbath Day but the moral law. The moral law found in the commandments is a test today of one’s walking by the spirit. In fact, when Paul details the fruit of the spirit and the nine virtues that make it up, he says, “Against such there is no law.” So in the New Testament, as Paul more than once refers to the fact that the moral law of the Old Testament has its application to us today, never let us think because the Scriptures say we are not under law but under grace that that means that therefore we can live in an antinomian way or against the Law of Moses living in license and sin. More will be said about that later on.

The source of the Pauline confidence is described in verses 4 and 5. The apostle says, “And such confidence we have through Christ toward God.” Now, I think it is important to note that that mention in verse 3, “Not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts,” causes Paul to launch into a comparison of the old covenant, the Mosaic Covenant with the new covenant promised by Jeremiah ratified by the Lord Jesus in his saving ministry.

So the contrasts are set forth here, and this would be, of course, a telling argument with Judaizers and lead on to what follows. The law has no power to touch men’s hearts because it’s external. Paul’s ministry is greater, he will point out in the words that follow, “For he ministers a fresh covenant.” The word that he used translated “new” is the word that means in our language “fresh,” new in quality, not new in time like recent, but a fresh covenant, the new covenant.

Now, the gospel does not aggregate the law, it fulfills it in one sense. He says it’s through Christ. In other words, it’s not by Paul’s ability that he has confidence. It’s not by his character, his apostolic holiness, that he has confidence, it’s not by his position as

an apostle, but it’s through the mediator, the Lord Jesus, that he has confidence. And such confidence have through Christ toward God. It’s because of what Christ has done for the church of Jesus Christ that the apostle has this confidence toward the Lord God.

Further, he says in the 5th verse, “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,” or is out of God.

He is humbly aware of his weakness and, thus, he knows and proves the total sufficiency of God’s grace. Whenever Paul says, Do as I do, he always implicitly in the background has in mind that the fact that everything that he does comes to him from God. You remember in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says, “He labored more abundantly than them all.” Then he said as if you might think now he really is bragging there. “Not I but the grace of God which was with me.”

So everything that Paul accomplished for the glory of God, he traced not to Paul but to the Lord God. And, incidentally, I think he was absolutely honest in doing that, too. For if you want to see what Paul was naturally, look at him before he was converted, and then compare him with the Paul afterwards, and that’s the difference the Lord God makes in a man like Paul.

Finally, in the 6th verse, he comes to the ground of the Pauline confidence. The contrast between letters written on stone and in hearts suggests the contrast between the two covenants, “Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit. For the letter kills but the spirit gives life.”

Now, when Paul mentions the new covenant, that’s an expression that all readers of the Bible would understand; he’s talking about, first of all, the covenant that God promised through the prophet Jeremiah. It’s described in chapter 31 in verse 31 through verse 34 of Jeremiah. One of the leading elements in the new covenant -- well, first of all, the new covenant was a unilateral covenant. Now, I didn’t ask you that as a question because this morning when I asked the eight-thirty class what are the leading ideas of the new covenant? A blank look came over most of the audience, and so I don’t want to

embarrass you. But what are the leading elements of the new covenant? Well, first of all, it is an unconditional covenant. It’s a unilateral covenant. It’s like the Abrahamic covenant in which the pieces of the animals were set opposite each other and Abraham was not invited to pass between the pieces but the Lord God did, and then gave the Abrahamic covenant suggestive of the fact that it was an unconditional covenant, God himself guaranteeing the promises that he was making. The new covenant is just like that. It’s a unilateral covenant made by God.

Now, someone might say, but do we not have to believe? Well, of course, we have to believe, but then we read further in the word of God. It’s God who promises to bring us to faith in him. Everything that we have comes from God, Paul says. Various other passages, many in the New Testament, so many that Augustine wrote several volumes dealing with several treatises dealing with the subject. Faith is the gift of God. It’s what God gives that we might meet the conditions of his unconditional covenant, which is to receive it. So listen to the words of the giving of the new covenant. “Behold the days of the coming declares the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel with the house of Judah.” He goes on in verse 33 to say, “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days declared the Lord. I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it and I will be their God and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother saying know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and their sin. I will remember no more.”

Over and over and over again the Lord says I will do this. I’m going to do this. You don’t find anything in here about conditions in the sense of conditionalism. When we turn to the New Testament in Matthew chapter 26, the Lord Jesus refers to this at the last Passover and first Lord’s Supper. We read and while this is Matthew 26:26. And while they were eating Jesus took some bread and after a blessing, he broke it and gave it

to the disciples and said, “Take, eat, this is my body. And he took a cup and gave thanks and gave it to them saying drink from it all of you. For this is my blood of the covenant,” also said new covenant, said to be the new covenant in the parallel passages, “For this is my blood of the covenant which is to be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”

So this is the covenant that the Lord Jesus was ratifying. The new covenant, a unilateral covenant, God determining to do something for those who are the recipients of those new covenant blessings. In fact, in the Old Testament when the Greek translation of the Hebrew text is made, the Greek translators guided, I think, in this sense by the providence of God used a term to render the term covenant that was often used in ancient times, in fact, most often of a testament, and that very fact indicated a unilateral kind of covenant, a testament, a will.

In the Old Testament there was a term *suntheke* which meant an agreement between people in which each had obligations. Those translators did not use the term *suntheke*. And in the New Testament, the apostles and others never used that term to describe the new covenant. They used the term *diatheke*, which referred to a unilateral kind of covenant. So obviously then the first and leading characteristic of the new covenant is that it is a unilateral covenant, but it’s also propitiatory. Listen to what Jesus says. He says in Matthew chapter 26 in verse 28, “For this is my blood of the covenant which is to be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.” In other words, there must be the shedding of blood, the satisfaction of the divine holiness, that is a leading idea of the new covenant.

And thirdly, it is substitutionary. Look at what he says in verse 28 again. “This is by blood of the covenant which is to be shed on behalf of many.” Putting all of the parallel passages together it is very obvious that the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking of a substitutionary covenant. Now, when we speak of a substitutionary covenant, we are

talking about a view of the atonement in which salvation is not simply made possible but actual for those with whom the covenant is made.

Listen to Jim Packer who has preached in our chapel a number of times. He says, the Armenian view that the atonement made salvation possible for all but not necessarily actual for any. That was the Armenian view. This meant abandoning any precise concept of Christ, death as substitutionary. For substitution is by its very nature an effective relationship securing actual immunity from obligation for the person in whose place the substitute has acted.

In other words, if it’s not a work that secures actual immunity from obligation, it’s not a substitution. That’s extremely important for us to remember. We cannot talk of substitution if it only accomplishes possible salvation. That’s not substitution. Substitution is to really pay the penalty for others.

Now, if one really pays the penalty for others, heaven has no grounds upon which it can punish us further. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus dies a substitutionary death, he dies bearing our penalty, and heaven can bring no further judgment upon us. We have no legal obligation to satisfy God’s holiness since Christ has accomplished it for us. That’s what Toplady meant when he said payment God will not twice demand, first from my bleeding shirt his hand and then again from mine. Double jeopardy pertains in Biblical things just as well as in other things.

So we are the benefits of sovereign grace. If I could just get the people who listen to me, and others as well, to understand sovereign grace, I’d go to my grave happy.[Laughter] You can stand by my grave and shout hallelujah, because that is the one thing that will transform a life, to understand sovereign grace, Oh, what a difference that makes.

What is sovereign grace? Well, it means that God is supreme in his dominions, independency. It means that he has the power of independent action, and it means also that he has optional power. That is, he can act or he doesn’t have to act. And the Bible

tells us that God is sovereign in his election, he’s sovereign in our regeneration, he’s sovereign in repentance, he’s sovereign in faith. Oh, we could go on and on, but in fine he is sovereign in our salvation. He as the sovereign possesses supremacy, independence, and optional power.

Don’t talk about a sovereign God if you don’t define it this way. Everybody in Evangelicalism acknowledges I believe in a sovereign God, but when you say what do you mean by it? Oh, what a difference begins to appear as individuals try to define sovereignty. And pretty soon when they finish defining sovereignty, he’s not sovereign at all. Ultimately man has the ultimate decision-making power.

I’ve seen this so often. I’ve been getting letters recently in which it seems as if God is encouraging this old preacher a little bit. He is sending me letters from people who are saying I would have been in the insane asylum were it not for sovereign grace. I got one this week from a Baptist minister in one of the Southern states. I’ve known him since he was a teenager. He was a basketball player. He’s had a very checkered career in the ministry. He went to Dallas Seminary for a while, graduated over in Fort Worth from the Baptist seminary there. He has carried on a good ministry. He is a good Bible teacher, but he’s had a number of problems, which he would acknowledge. I am not telling anything behind his back. He’ll probably listen to this because he still listens to the tapes. He wrote me a letter last week. He said, I’ve been listening to some of your tapes today, and it prompted me to thank God for your ministry. I’ve had ended up in the insane asylum if your teaching of the sovereignty of God had not been received. He had been under psychiatric care for some years, and he’s had six years now of ministry. This man is probably fifty years of age now. He’s had six years of ministry with no serious problems at all, tracing it to sovereign grace.

I mentioned to you the letter of the lady who wrote me that she was under psychiatric care, in danger of losing her mind and her husband, and she heard the messages over Buffalo on sovereign grace, and she said that is that which straightened me

out and brought me to the knowledge of the Lord. She’s in an Evangelical church in the south of the city at the present time.

The old covenant while we are going to talk about the old covenant considerably in a few moments -- I mean, a few weeks. Because the old covenant is the subject of verse 4 through verse 11 and particularly verse 7 through verse 18 of the remainder of the chapter. So I’ll say only this about it. The old covenant or the Mosaic Law was like a mirror with its Ten Commandments. A mirror doesn’t really tell us anything but that we need soap. And the soap is the soap of the gospel, the law is the mirror that reveals our need. The law is a diagnostician, not a surgeon. The surgeon is the one who by his skill is able to excise cancer. The diagnostician is able to tell us it’s there. The law brings conviction of the full knowledge of sin. Today, we are afflicted by so many people in Evangelicalism who do not understand the grace of God and the Christian church is filled with people just like Lucien said, who are simple minded and not knowing the word of God are supporting works that should not be supported.

This week, one leading professing Christian T.V. personality acknowledged that for seventeen years she had been on drugs and yet carrying on a ministry well known among Evangelical Christians. I read two or three years ago when I was traveling to Trinity an incident in the paper that she and her husband possessed a Rolls, two Mercedes, a home in Palm Springs, various other kinds of property, and they were begging for money because the program was having difficulty. And all the time this kind of unreality in the midst of that home.

So I’ll sum it up. Paul is rejoicing in his ministry of the life-giving gospel. The law killed hope because it did not provide hope. The law killed life, as a matter of fact, it killed. It also killed strength. The new covenant provides the positives. When the Son has risen, the lamps cease to be of any use, and Paul to minister of the new covenant, a unilateral, propitiatory, substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the saving benefits of the Lord’s death are ministered graciously to those who, by the Holy Spirit,

have been prepared to receive what Christ has done. So the apostle avoids the tricks, he avoids the gimmicks, he avoids the fads, the schemes, the ploys, the Bunco games, and traces everything ultimately that may be called fruit to the Lord God himself. May God help us to learn the lessons from him, and may he deliver us from failure to understand and failure to recognize that the truth ultimately is from God.

If you are here today and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel invitation goes out to you. If God in his grace has made plain to you and brought conviction to you of your sin and your need this gospel is for you, and you may find in it deliverance from your sin, deliverance from the slavery in which you find yourself in whatever particular manifestation it may be found. There is deliverance in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and thrilling deliverance in sovereign grace. May God help you to come to Christ and believe in him. Don’t leave this auditorium without the assurance of the forgiveness of sins through that which Christ accomplishes. Bow in your heart. Tell the Lord if this really expresses your attitude, Lord, I know I am a sinner. I know I stand under divine condemnation. I know I am bound in the slavery of sin. You have announced in the word of God that deliverance is through Christ. I’m coming for that deliverance. Make that decision personally in your heart to the Lord, and enjoy the beginning of the life that is life indeed. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee and thankful for the ministry of the new covenant, the covenant by which the truth of God is implanted in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, given new life, new hope, new strength. Lord, we desire to please Thee. If there are some here who have never come to Christ yet, Lord, at this very moment touch their hearts to that end.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

