



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 4:1-2

“The Modern Church and the Deceitful Handling of the Word of God.” TRANSCRIPT

Mr. Pryor mentioned Spain, but I look here and notice there is someone who has written from Malawi in Central Africa and someone from Rome -- Rome, Pennsylvania, however. [Johnson laughs] But anyway, I like the comment that that individual who wrote from Malawi made. “I really was a very bad man. And one day I was passing through somebody’s house, who was already saved, heard the gospel, and since then has been a child of God.” Very interesting, some of those comments that people write in about.

And particularly amazing, I think, that many of them write in and obviously have not had a great deal of education, and in spite of that, they are able to respond to the word of God. And I recall the statement made by James Denny, who was professor of theology at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, who once spoke to that very point by saying that there are people who consider the Apostle Paul to be very difficult to follow. And the facts are, Professor Denny went on to say, that if people in theological classrooms cannot follow Paul, people in mission halls and on the streets and in the simplest kinds of meetings can because the qualification for understanding Paul is not theological scholarship, but despair, personal despair and the sense of one’s unworthiness and need of salvation. And he said, if people in the theological classrooms cannot

respond to Paul, those out there who have that moral preparation can. And I think we see that constantly in the way in which people respond to the ministry of the word over the radio in the Believers Bible Hour. That, to me, is one of the really great encouraging things.

We are going through 2 Corinthians, as you know, and at the moment we are going through very slowly. Now, Mr. Pryor said chapter-by-chapter which is true, but we are also really going verse by verse. And there is a two-fold reason for that. First of all, I think this section of 2 Corinthians is very important, and the second is a selfish reason. Many times in the past I have taught exegetical classes through 2 Corinthians in the Greek text and having a personal desire to expound it in a little more detail, I have been taking some extra time, and I hope that it is not bothering you too much. But today also I must say that I am going to spend a good part of our time in application of some of the things that Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 1 and verse 2. That is our Scripture reading, and so if you will turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, we are just going to read the 2 verses with which the 4th chapter opens.

Now, remember, the apostle has been, in a sense, giving a defense for his apostolic ministry explaining why he ministers as he does and also defending the things that he proclaims. And he has been making the point that he is a minister of the new covenant, not the old covenant, an unconditional covenant and eternal priesthood involved with it, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews so ably points out, and grounded in the once-and-for-all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s the ministry that Paul has received as the apostle of the Gentiles, and that’s the ministry that he has sought to proclaim.

Verse 1 of chapter 4,

“Therefore,” (the Greek text says simply “on account of this.” That is what he’s just been talking about.) “Since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not

lose heart, but have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God.”

I’d like to interrupt and say that this expression “adulterating the word of God” is not inaccurate. Strictly speaking, what Paul states is not handling the word of God deceitfully. I think that is more significant particularly for our day in spite of the rendering of the New American Standard Bible. So I would render this not walking in craftiness or handling the word of God deceitfully but “by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” I won’t say much about that in the message “in the sight of God,” but I think everyone who attempts to teach the Scriptures would love to be able to say what Paul says when he says that he invites the attention of any man’s conscience to his ministry and in the sight of God. That is, he ministers, he believes in the sight of God.

You remember in chapter 2, verse 17 he said, “For we are not like many peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” I wish that it were possible for me to say, with the sense of assurance, that I preached as in the sight of God. I believe the apostle did. I wish I were able to say the same thing. Nothing could be better than to be able to say that. May the Lord bless the reading of his word, and let’s bow now for a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father we approach Thee through the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee and praise Thee that he is the one who has ratified the New Covenant in his blood and has made it possible for us to have the forgiveness of sins through the work that he accomplished once and for all by dying as our representative on the cross at Calvary. We are grateful, Lord, and we are thankful and we worship Thee, the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit out of a sense of gratitude and thankfulness for the mercy and grace that has been shown to us who are so unworthy.

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We thank Thee for the privilege of proclaiming the word of God. And, Lord, we pray that the ministry of the word of God may be supported by the work of the Holy Spirit in conviction and conversion, illumination and enlightenment. We thank Thee for the privilege, as a local assembly, of proclaiming the word of God. And we pray for the ministry of the Chapel over the radio, through the publications, especially by means of the tapes. May, if it please Thee, Lord, many come to a deeper understanding of the word of God and also to the desire to make our Lord known as well where they are.

We thank Thee for our elders and for our deacons and for our members and for the friends who are with us today and the visitors. We commend them to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon them in a spiritual as well as in a physical way. We pray for the sick and for the disturbed and for the perplexed and for the bereaved. And, Lord, we ask that the petitions that have been offered to Thee, and which we have been asked to offer, may receive an affirmative hearing from Thee in accordance with Thy will. We pray that Thou wilt encourage and bless and strengthen and supply the needs that exist in the lives of so many of the saints.

We thank Thee for our country and for our President, and we pray for him and for others who are with him in government, protect and keep the United States of America and enable us, Lord, to continue to have the freedom to proclaim the word of God in our society which seems to be such a needy society today.

And now we ask, Lord, that as we sing together, as we listen to the word of God that we may have the sense of Thy presence with us. Give us enlightenment and encouragement and build us up in our faith.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] I do love, I must confess, to sing some of those great old hymns that were written by some of our outstanding hymn writers. It has been said, concerning me, that I tend toward the doctrine of sovereign grace. And as you well know, Charles

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Wesley, who wrote that hymn, and John Wesley’s brother, were believers in something a little less than sovereign grace so they said. But when one reads their hymns, one finds those notes of sovereign grace here and there through them. And I think that Jim Packer is correct. They were confused Calvinists. [Laughter] Basically they believed in sovereign grace but it just doesn’t come out always. But some marvelous sentiments and that hymn has some marvelous sentiments in it as well. So we can rejoice in the manifestations of the grace of God in the Wesleyans, and in the Lutherans, as well as in those other people to whom I belong.

The subject for today is “The Modern Church and Deceitful Handling of the Word of God,” and you can probably tell by the fact that I’ve chosen just two verses today, contrary to my usual custom, that I want to make application in some detail of some of the things that Paul says here. Now, we could have done this at chapter 2, verse 17 because the same truth, I think, is expressed there. But here we are going to do it with verses 1 and 2 of chapter 4. So, “The Modern Church and Deceitful Handling of the Word of God.”

Always astonishing is the capacity of the modern world for spiritual error. We remember a few years back, the incident surrounding Jim Jones and the People’s Temple. We have the Moonies still with us. We have the Jehovah’s Witnesses still with us. All of them, I think, the apostle would classify it as individuals who adulterate the word of God. We have on the T.V. screen some very unusual things happening even there. Perhaps you saw it. A recent article states, “Out on a Limb: Shirley MacClaine’s two-part, five-hour, primetime, ABC metaphysical orgy.” Tom Shales of *The Washington Post* wrote these words, “Before part I is over, MacClaine is standing on the beach at Malibu, one of the centers of existential thought,” he undoubtedly said that with tongue in cheek, “and chanting on orders from her reincarnated lover that she is the Pacific Ocean, that she is all things. He even gets her to assert, I am God. Actually, for many Hollywood stars this is not such a big leap to make,” so Mr. Shales said.

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The author of this article goes on to say, he’s a Lutheran minister, “People in show business,” says Shales, “seem to have a particular terror of mortality, and MacLaine says that reincarnation has taught her that she need no longer fear death. Shales is right to be amused, amusedly tolerant, of Ms. MacLaine’s spiritual kinkiness, since she is obviously a little shaky upstairs. But just as obviously, Ms. MacLaine and the people who committed these five hours thought they were making a very serious statement indeed. And that raises an interesting question,” he said. “Can one imagine five hours of network primetime devoted to an honest rendering of a Christian conversion experience or a Christian religious experience of any sort? No, not even in one of those Christmas or Easter specials, certainly not with the main subject given carte blanche, as was Ms. MacLaine to explain and advocate the experience in question.”

We are living in very, very interesting days. I don’t regret at all that we are living in the kinds of days that we are interested in because we are going to see, it seems to me, much more plainly the difference between orthodox Christianity and unorthodox professing Christianity. We have many errors that are being proclaimed as being Christian. We have, for example, homosexuality set forth as being within the purview of biblical teaching. We have effeminism, some of it very justified, but other parts of it by virtue of the abandonment of sound hermeneutical principles, not justified at all. We won’t talk about that today. We have other errors concerning Christ’s person and work that are very significant even proclaimed by professing Christians. And then we have that which I would call Christian errors; that is, it seems to me by people who probably fall within the Christian family. I’m speaking of the Charismatics, for the most part. Many of them hold relatively sound views concerning the person and the atoning work of Jesus Christ. But other views are quite different. In fact, in other views there is an adulterating of the word of God clearly going on.

We have a remarkable thing even in evangelicalism of which we might say we are a part. We have many instances of moral failure, moral, sinful failure. We all have a high

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regard for the theological institution in this city which proclaims the word of God, the institution of which I was a faculty member for many years. Thinking back this week over the many men that have gone through that institution and then thinking about a number of them and what they are today, one cannot help but sense that there has been significant moral failure in the lives of many of those men. Many of them guilty of adultery and various other kinds of sins and many of them no longer in the ministry to which they thought they were called. Some I think recalled by the grace of God back to ministry which they were forced to leave for as many as ten years.

It’s remarkable to think about the ways in which we as individuals fail. I hesitate to speak about this because I know my own heart is so prone to depart from the word of God as Wesley was singing -- having us sing about those thousand failures that so frequently are a part of our life day by day. But it’s remarkable, moral failure, doctrinal failure in Christian people. Of course in professing Christian people and then in those like Ms. MacLaine who is a follower of the New Age, a pantheistic kind of doctrine that is thoroughly anti-Christian but which uses terms that Christians could identify with if they didn’t know anything other than just the terminology.

Striking in the light of that is Paul’s defense of his gospel decorum and his holiness. Listen to what Paul says, “We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness or handling the word of God deceitfully, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” In effect what Paul is saying, take a good look at my life and ministry and see if you can find anything in it that is not in harmony with the word of God.

Now, Paul knew there were things that were not in harmony because he later -- or earlier actually in this particular case -- he makes the proper confession. He says he doesn’t know anything that is wrong in his life, but nevertheless, he states that he will not have the final word on that until the judgment seat of Christ. He says, “I am conscience of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted, but the one who examines me is

the Lord.” And he goes on to say that the Lord will make manifest the motives of one’s heart in the judgment to which even the apostle will undergo. But amazing is his confession of his, so far as he can tell, living up to the truth of the word of God.

One might ask, What is Paul’s secret? Well, of course, he doesn’t explain the totality of the secret here; one must study the Apostle Paul. But he does give us a little clue I think, if you’ll notice carefully that first verse, he says “Therefore since we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.” I suggest to you that the evangelical ministry is by virtue of the evangelical mercy which Paul has experienced. In other words, his faithfulness he traces to the sense and the experience of the mercy of God. And an individual who has understood himself and come to understand his sinfulness before the Lord God and has come to understand how he has been forgiven, that’s the greatest motive for faithfulness in the ministry of the word of God. So “as I have received mercy, I do not lose heart.”

Christians can understand that, non-Christians cannot. For they do not have the sense of their sin, they do not have the sense of the mercy of God shown to them, but the apostle had both of those things and therefore he can say I’m not fainting, God’s with me, he’s given me the forgiveness of my sins, and I’m forever grateful to him for that. Paul considers the ministry given to him a treasure. He says in the 7th verse, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” It’s a treasure of grace bestowing life, the spirit, freedom from the law, a divinely given righteousness, not earned righteousness, given righteousness from new covenant ministry, and it’s gripped him, and in ministering these eternal riches he can never give up. That’s what he’s saying.

Now, for a few moments let’s take a look at what he says in verses 1 and 2, and then in about ten minutes from now, I’d like to spend the last part of our time on applying what Paul has said to our modern situation. He writes first of his divinely given courage in verse 1, “Therefore in the light of the new covenant ministry given to me, I do not lose heart.” Now when he talks about the new covenant ministry -- I’ll just have to

summarize this because we don’t have time to give the details of it. But obviously from what he said up to this point, he is talking not about a legal ministry; he’s talking about a gracious ministry. He’s not talking about a forgiveness of sins that is worked out by good works, that’s impossible. Israel sought righteousness by the works of the law and failed as does everyone else. No one can be saved by what they do. So the righteousness and grace is a free product of God’s mercy. Not an achievement of human ability but a consequence of divine mercy.

There is a well-known Bible teacher of a generation ago who in his ministry had a rather wide and fruitful service of the Lord among the Christians as well as being an evangelist at one time as well. He in one of his little works makes reference to the fact of the cross of Christ and then he adds these words, “And may I say that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ never means a thing to us until it takes our breath away and becomes the biggest thing in life.”

Anyone reading the Apostle Paul would clearly understand that that is precisely what happened to him. He doesn’t talk about the teaching our Lord gave in his earthly ministry. What he knew of the gospel records that were being circulated were not absolutely certain, but we know this, the thing that impressed Paul was the fact that he died on Calvary’s Cross, was buried and raised again on the third day and the significance of that great atoning work is the prime theme of the apostle’s teaching. So Mr. “Sinjin” is right. Incidentally, this Bible teacher’s name was St. John but like the English they love to pronounce English in ways that we English-speaking people don’t quite comprehend, Mr. St. John pronounced his name “Sinjin.” So Mr. St. John is the one who said, “May I say that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ never means a thing to us until it takes our breath away and becomes the biggest thing in life.”

And Helmut Thielicke, to give the word of a German theologian, has said something very similar. He says, “I will make bold to say that even the most orthodox churchman will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is continually surprised that

mercy has been shown to him.” Isn’t that marvelous? That’s true. Continually surprised that mercy has been shown to us who are so wicked and sinful. So Paul talks then about the ministry of grace as we have received mercy. He also goes on to speak about his response, “Therefore we do not lose heart.” That’s very plain. I think anyone can understand it, so we pass on to verse 2, the two-fold character of Paul’s apostolic ministry.

But, now it’s clear from the context that the apostle here has across his mind the thought of those in Corinth who were opposing him, and this marks the contrast with the unfaithful who were seeking to disturb the Corinthians and tell them things about the Apostle Paul that would prevent them from following the teaching that Paul had given them when he preached the gospel to them. There are rumblings, in other words, here of things that will follow later on in the epistle. When we get to chapter 10 through chapter 13, we will see that the apostle there speaks about the errors, particularly of individuals who were opposing him, and he speaks very strongly about these individuals even calling them false apostles and ministers of Satan who are going around as ministers of righteousness, but nevertheless do not belong to the Lord God.

He talks about renunciation and manifestation. Notice his statement, “But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God.” What are those things hidden? Well, we only can learn that from the apostle’s writings here and elsewhere. And in the light of the specific context of 2 Corinthians, it’s probably the falsification of the gospel of grace by legalism that troubled Paul in his ministry all over that part of the world, particularly in the Galatian epistle when he talks about those who sought to make circumcision a requirement for salvation. He called that another gospel.

We have to remember that the apostle thought very strongly about the purity of the gospel of Christ. It upset him tremendously when an accurate gospel was not preached. In fact, the apostle could even be upset tremendously with people who believe the same thing about the person of Christ, the same thing about the work of

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Christ, the same thing about his death, the same thing about his burial, the same thing about his resurrection, and perhaps the same thing about his second coming, but who insisted that one can only obtain the benefits of what he did by going through the sacramental system. Paul considered that a nullification of the gospel of Christ. That’s difficult for our modern world to take. But our modern world is out of step with the Apostle Paul. He thinks too clearly for most of us.

He saw that if one man stands here and says, I believe all of these things and another man stands here and says I believe all of the same things, but I think you must do these things in order to have the benefit from these things that Paul saw that that introduced the principle of works. And so, in Paul’s mind, that nullified the marvelous things accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. If I should say to you and you believe the same things as I, but you must be circumcised in order to be saved then you must do something physical, material, with a material instrumentality in order to enter into the family of God. Your salvation is the product of what Christ did plus what you did, and so the principle of grace is destroyed, and Paul calls that a different gospel. And in fact, he says, “Though we are an angel from heaven should preach any of the gospel than that which I have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Modern language translation -- let him go to hell. That’s precisely what that expression means in the original text. If you are shocked, well, I hope you will think about what Paul said and about how firmly he believed it.

So when he thinks about things hidden, shameful things, deceitful, dishonoring, devilish, he will point out in chapter 11, he’s talking, I think, about the falsification of the gospel by legalism. He says not walking in craftiness, adopting any means to gain an end, a counterfeit gospel decked out with unworthy editions in language that seems very religious and very New Testament as is so often the case. Adulterating the word of God, fallacious arguments, deceitful misinterpretations regarding the law, regarding the

relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament and things like this. The apostle felt very, very strongly about them.

And to counter that, he said in the latter part of that verse, “But by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” Every kind of conscience among men, clear or dull, whether reason or passion, Paul asks, take a look and see if the things that we proclaim are not in harmony with the life that is lived. I love that expression “in the sight of God” because he makes an appeal to which no one can go higher “in the sight of God.”

Now, I’d like to say a few words about the modern church and its ministry, a few instances of what I would call hidden things of shame: adulteration of the word of God, handling deceitfully the word of God. And I’d like to say a few things about doctrinal deceit, and then a few things about ethical deceit, and then finally a few things about moral failure. And first of all, just a few things because obviously we could talk for days and days about error regarding spiritual things in the professing Christian church. Isn’t that startling? But it’s true. Some of the modern denials of historic orthodoxy include denial of biblical authority. The Christian church has believed down through the centuries that in the Bible we have the oracles of God. That is, God speaking through the Old Testament, God speaking through the New Testament Scriptures. But today the Scriptures in the minds of many of our leading theologians are not the oracles of God, but simply the record of religious experiences of an ancient people.

One of my teachers under whom I studied for a considerable period of time, Professor James Barr of the University of Edinburgh, later professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, today Professor in the University of Oxford in Oxford, England, an outstanding Old Testament linguist. Professor Barr has this to say about the Bible, “My account of the formation of the biblical tradition is an account of a human work. It’s a man’s statement of his beliefs, the events he has experienced, the stories he has been told and saw. It has long been customary to align the Bible with

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concepts like word of God or revelation. And one effect has been to align the Bible with movement from God to man. It’s man who developed the biblical tradition and man who decided when it might be suitably fixed and made canonical. If one wants to use the word of God type of language, the proper term for the Bible would be “word of Israel, word of some leading Christians.” I sat in a class with Professor Barr, I was the only student. We got to know each other real well. We were reading the original text of Qumran and the Manual of Discipline in unpointed Hebrew. I took a course in the Septuagint with Professor Barr and, as I remember, I was the only student in that class. He was not blessed with a lot of students [laughter], but an outstanding linguist. These are the things that he believed in the Church of Scotland’s Theological School at University of Edinburgh, a new college in those days.

Now, I think about Professor Barr’s views, highly regarded man obviously, extremely highly regarded as a linguist. The Bible writers believed that the Scriptures were inspired of God. The Bible writers, including Old and New Testament men, regarded the Scriptures that they new as word of God. The law of Jesus believed that the Old Testament Scriptures were the word of God. He said, for example, regarding David, “David spoke in the Spirit.” And, thirdly, the Christian church down through the years has believed that the Scriptures were the word of God.

Now Professor Barr is Presbyterian minister. Listen to what his own doctrinal statement says about the Scriptures. This is from the Westminster Confession of Faith. “All the books of the Old and New Testament are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith in life.” Now, here is a man who has subscribed to the doctrine of that confession of faith saying the things that he is saying. I ask you, Is this deceitful handling of the word of God? Is this adulterating the word of God? Do you think the Apostle Paul would say that what he is saying is well within the kind of teaching that I am giving?

The modern church denies the personal infinite God and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Donald Bloesch, a Presbyterian minister who is an evangelical who does believe

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the Scriptures and who is a Presbyterian minister in one of our theological seminaries teaching theology in Dubuque, Iowa, he says this, “If there is anything that characterizes modern theology, it’s the loss of the supernatural living God of the Scriptures. Instead of the personal infinite God of biblical faith, we have a God that is impersonal and even finite or limited. A cursory examination of current movements in theology reveals how drastically the doctrine of God is being reinterpreted. In liberation theology, it’s fashionable to describe God as the power of the future or the event of self-liberating love.” That really speaks to you, doesn’t it? I know.

“In process theology God becomes the creative process within nature, the directive of history or the principle of integration. In neo-Catholic theology,” Professor Bloesch continues, “God is sometimes described as the infinite in the finite or the absolute in the relative. In the neo-platonic mysticism of scholars like Tillich, God becomes the ground or depth of being, the infinite abyss beyond personality. In neo-mysticism, which tends to align itself with naturalism as opposed to idealism, God is reconceived as the creative surge within nature. What’s occurring in Western technological society is the democratization of God. In line with technocratic values; God becomes the facilitator of director of the world process rather than the Lord of the universe. No longer the creator, he is now the power of creativity or simply -- and anyone who attends the movies will recognize this phrase, he’s simply, quote, ‘the Force,’ unquote.”

This is what we are hearing in our theological schools, professing Christian schools. In a time when God has become a mystical blur, it is well to remember that human language can convey the knowledge of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is a personal, infinite being, and we shall ultimately find that out, I hope, to our blessing.

Well, to move from the scholarly word to the non-scholarly world, and I’m sure you agree that these individuals who teach these things under the guise of professing Christianity are adulterating the word of God.

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Think of the Jehovah’s Witnesses who translate John 1:1 this way in order to deny the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity on which the church stands. “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was *a God.*” Now, it doesn’t take any knowledge of Greek grammar at all to realize that that is an erroneous translation designed to support a doctrine to which they have been committed. That is handling the word of God deceitfully. That is adulterating the word of God in order to support, in this case, a strongly held predilection against the trinitarian God of Christianity.

Or take the denial of biblical salvation, Christ is no longer sin bearer and mediator, but now he is the liberator from political and economic oppression. Instead of purveying grace to guilty people, he is an individual who is seeking to deliver them from political oppression. We don’t deny, no Christian denies, that to be under political oppression is evil and certainly to be economically oppressed is also evil. But that’s not the Christian gospel. The Christian gospel has to do with what Luther called the tyrants. I like this. Luther could always get to the point with the fewest number of words, it seems. “The Christian gospel has to do with the tyrants.” Incidentally, at the breakfast table today someone turned to me and said, what are the turrants? And I had to pronounce tyrants in my good Southern accent slowly so they would get it. But anyway Luther spoke about the tyrants: sin, death, and the devil. They are the tyrants. They are the things which we should be concerned all of us, sin, death, and the devil. That’s Pauline.

The tragedy of modern Christianity is reflected in the spiritual history of John Hick to this point. Professor John Hick was Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham in England, a Presbyterian minister or member of a Presbyterian denomination in England came to the United States, is now a professor in Claremont Graduate School, Danforth Professor of Philosophy of Religion there. Professor Hicks sought to have his status as a Presbyterian minister confirmed by being taken into the San Gabriel Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. And he was so well known for his denial of the deity of Christ, denial of the truth, denial of salvation through Christianity

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and through Christ alone that the Presbytery has been four years in dealing with his case and finally with a vote, I think as I remember, ninety-six to ninety-two, he was refused acceptance in the Presbytery.

Now, I applaud that decision, in fact, it should have been made one hundred and eighty whatever to nothing by men who hold to the Westminster Confession of Faith. But the very fact that it was that close will give you some idea of the status of the Christian world which is about us. The turrants are really the tyrants [laughter]. Professor Hick, I must say, a gentlemanly man, acknowledged he would not fight it any longer and will continue to teach philosophy of religion. A highly accomplished man whose books I have read and have in my library, but he just should not be a minister in a Christian church holding to the Westminster Confession of Faith. So these are the kinds of things that we have within us. Ethical deceit, we have cultural relativism, situation ethics, our Joseph Fletcher also a religious man, behaviorism, life serves the purpose of the DNA code, emotive ethics, all of these things taught within the body of the professing Christian believers. What is right or what is wrong? Well, whatever we feel is right is right. Whatever we feel is wrong is wrong, taught within the Christian faith. Amazing.

Moral failure, I'd like to say just a few words about the abysmal scandal of the health and wealth gospel of which we are all familiar now. In the health and wealth gospel of the Charismatics, and incidentally there are many lovely people in the Charismatics, many true Christian people, and those certainly we should honor and love in Christ. But I cannot help but feel that theologically they are very immature and very weak.

In the Charismatic movement, the health and wealth gospel centers around three teachings, divine healing in the atonement -- incidentally that is correct. Divine healing is in the atonement. The desire to refute their teaching on that point I think is misguided. Divine healing is in the atonement. In other words, because of what Christ did on Calvary's cross, we shall be physically healed at the resurrection. The point is, when? If

we say divine healing is in the atonement for now, the New Testament refutes that teaching. But if we say divine healing is in the atonement and if we handle the texts of Scripture as Matthew did in chapter 8 citing from Isaiah chapter 53, it’s valid to say that divine healing is in the atonement. But for them, when Christ comes and we all are given a body like unto his own glorious body, then shall be physically healed. I won’t even have to wear my glasses, nor will you. And, in fact, I won’t feel all of these things in my body that I feel from time to time. In fact, if I were to play golf, I probably could shoot a sixty-two, then. But at the moment, there is no healing of that kind for my body. I still slice and hook and top and dunk shots into the bunkers. It’s part of the bodily nature that we have.

Second doctrine, prosperity theology. God wants everyone of us to be a wealthy person. We are not meant to live on barely-get-along-street, where I have lived for many years, as a matter of fact. When I was going through theological seminary, I didn’t even have enough money to put in the bank, I kept it between the pages of a book. I don’t know whether that was even living by faith, I wouldn’t want to dignify it that way. It was barely get along street, I’ll tell you that. And it was 3909 Swiss Avenue, too, some of you theological students will recognize that. I know you can survive when living by faith because I survived and my kind of weak Christianity, God reached out his hand like he did for Peter when Peter was sinking, looking at the boisterous waves and saved him, he delivered me.

The third doctrine of the Charismatics today, positive confession. Name it and claim it and it will be yours. Well, healing is in the atonement but at the resurrection. Wealth is at the sovereign disposition of God. Some Christians are wealthy, some are not. Paul was not. Read 1 Corinthians chapter 4. He describes himself as just managing to get along. The Lord Jesus said he didn’t have a place to lay down his head. The idea that every Christian is to be wealthy and that we should brag about the kind of car we drive and the bank accounts that we have and the homes that we have and the two or three

other homes that we have, that is simply false to the word of God. The word of God has promised that God will supply our needs. We can count on that, and he will supply our needs.

I’m going to tell you just a little story of a man who was a Christian man and with this I’ll have to stop. Hobart Freeman was a business man, converted at age thirty-two became very interested in Christian work, went to college, then went to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, graduated there, and then took a doctorate at Grace Theological Seminary, a well-known evangelical school. He was asked to teach on the Old Testament faculty there and, in fact, wrote a book which was well received in the Christian world, particularly among the Bible colleges entitled *Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets*. As I remember, it was my published by Moody Press. I did not check this. After teaching a couple of years there and being very much opposed to observing Christmas and Easter, which he thought were pagan doctrines, pagan festivals, he was asked to resign, which he did. He then received the Charismatic baptism of the Holy Spirit, the gift of prophecy and speaking in tongues, and established a church called, I’ve forgotten the exact title but I believe it was something like, Faith Assembly. At any rate, it was near Fort Wayne, Indiana.

One of the things that Dr. Freeman insisted upon was that when one had physical difficulties they should not see a doctor. Well, to make a long story short and without giving details, after a period of time the unnecessary deaths in that particular assembly of people had risen to ninety of people who refused to go to the doctor who then ultimately lost their lives. Eyeglasses, incidentally, were characterized as medical assistance. The result occurred that was that many members lost their driving licenses, but many also were spotted driving into the church parking wearing their glasses and then carefully taking them off before they went into the meetings. Dr. Freeman reportedly told his congregation that he never expected to die but in 1984 he died of bronchopneumonia and heart failure having received no medical treatment for either problem.

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The story of the Charismatic movement is the story of scandal after scandal and misunderstanding of the word of God, from the days of Peter Wolfe in the thirties, with Aimee Semple McPherson, her scandal-filled career was well known to us that were not even Christians. Catherine Kuhlman who took up with a traveling evangelist and who finally divorced his wife in order to marry her. The scandal scattered the Denver congregation of which she was the head, but she moved to Pennsylvania because we have a very short memory in the United States, and one can travel from Colorado to Pennsylvania, particularly in those days, and start over again which she did. And later, as you well know, she ultimately had a television program that was one of CBS’s networks longest-running programs until her death about ten years ago. A.A. Allen the best known of the television or Revivalist Evangelists in the sixties, had a mailing list of hundreds of thousands and promised individual attention to each request, boasting that countless thousands are being healed today by the ministry of “blessed clause.” His life didn’t back up his teaching. He was arrested for drunken driving in 1965. He was put out of the Assemblies of God -- that speaks well for that denomination. He died in 1970 at the age of fifty-nine a victim of acute alcoholism and fatty infiltration of the liver.

What would we say about this? Would we say that this is adulteration of the word of God? Would we say that this is handling the word of God deceitfully? Certainly the results tend to suggest that there is a great deal of that. Kenneth Hagan, Jr., a very prominent Charismatic, has said, “Today everything Jesus purchased for us on Calvary can be obtained by faith.” That’s true. That’s true. Everything purchased for us by the Lord Jesus on Calvary can be received through faith. But what is missing is the time element.

It’s true that everything the Lord Jesus died to obtain will be ours, but not now. Not yet. That’s why when we read in the Bible we read about faith, love, and hope. We have a lot to look forward to. That was purchased by the Lord Jesus, too. So may God deliver us from what Paul is talking about. May we pay attention to, we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating

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the word of God by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the presence of God. May God help us to evaluate the truths that we listen to, pay attention to, read about, hear about, even from me, by the word of God. If an experience is not wedded to the words of holy Scripture, mistrust it. May God help us to put the word of God first, our experience, true experience following if it harmonizes with that teaching.

If you are here today and you’ve never believed in Christ, we remind you that he died for sinners. We are sinners, all of us. Paul received mercy. Come to Christ, acknowledge your lost condition, believe in him who died for sinner and receive the free gift of the Holy Spirit, eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, justification, all of the things that Paul ministered through his new covenant ministry. May God in his marvelous grace touch your heart to that end. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful for these words of warning from the Apostle Paul, the confession of the mercy that he received and the sense of exaltation when we hear him say “we do not lose heart.” At the same time, Lord, deliver us from those that walk in craftiness handling the word of God deceitfully, purveying the hidden things of shame. If there are those here who have never believed in him whom to know his life eternal may at this very moment may turn to Thee, confess their need, and receive him as their Savior with all of the New Covenant benefits which he has won by the bloodshed on Calvary’s cross.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.